

## **ABSTRACT**

BARBOUR, ALEXANDRIA JOY. "What the Teacher Says"; A Qualitative Study Exploring Teacher Perspectives of EL Education (Under the direction of Dr. Erin Horne and Dr. Carl Young).

A teachers' perspective of a curriculum impacts how they deliver instruction whether that be positive or negative. The purpose of this case study was to explore teacher perspectives of EL curriculum and to learn what factors impact teachers' perspectives of the curriculum. This study took place over the course of nine weeks of the 2020-2021 school year. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Data was analyzed using inductive coding. Use of the data collection tools allowed the researcher to dig deeper into what impacted their perspectives. Two overarching themes emerged, implementation expectations and the student experience. Implementation expectations and the student experience both encompass individual factors that impact how a teacher perceives EL education.

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“What the Teacher Says”; A Qualitative Study Exploring Teacher Perspectives of EL Education

by  
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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my grandfather, Billy W. Ray, who instilled in me the importance of education at a very young age. Upon graduating from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, my grandfather said to me, "I'll be proud of you when you get your master's degree." Now, I say to my grandfather - *Look, Grandpa, I did it! I am molded forever by your calm and nurturing spirit. I appreciate your words of wisdom. On July 16th, 2017, when you passed away, I felt like a chunk of my dream was taken away from me. You didn't get to see me receive my master's degree physically. However, I have been reminded by so many that you will still see me graduate and complete my thesis. So again, thank you for the motivation to dig deep and get it done. I love you always!* Additionally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my brother Quinn, and my nephew and niece, Brody and Kailynn. Please know that you can do anything you put your mind to. This is the proof! With dedication, determination, hard work, and faith you will always find your way.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Alexandria Barbour is a native of North Carolina. She grew up in a small town on the outskirts of Raleigh. She is the first woman in her family to earn a college degree. Alexandria attended the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to complete her undergraduate degree in Elementary Education. Alexandria graduated in 2013 and began teaching first grade. She taught first grade for two years and fourth grade for six years. Alexandria desires to share her love and passion for learning with as many students as possible. Completing this thesis was extremely important to Alexandria because she broke through the barrier as a first-generation master's student. Alexandria knew it was essential to complete this process so she would have the tools to assist others in her community with this knowledge. Alexandria is currently in her final semester of the Curriculum and Developmental Supervision master's program at North Carolina State University. She expects to graduate in December of 2021 with a Master of Science in Education.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

This qualitative research study explored teachers' perspectives of expeditionary learning (EL) education through the lens of their personal experiences. Learning about each teacher's perspective of EL allowed me to find the common factors that influenced their perspectives. Specifically, I wanted to examine what factors influenced perceptions of EL across different teaching settings. This study was critical because I desired to learn more about teachers' perceptions of Expeditionary Learning and their experiences with the curriculum.

#### **Expeditionary Learning (EL)**

“EL Education K-8 Language Arts curriculum is a comprehensive, standards-based literacy program that engages teachers and students through compelling, real-world content” (EL Education, n.d.). Expeditionary Learning (EL) education has been adopted by over 20 schools and five school districts and counties in the Southeastern United States. Hundreds of teachers across these various schools and school districts deliver instruction daily through the EL education program. According to EL Education, the vision for the curriculum program is “seeing students and teachers engaged in work that is challenging, adventurous, and meaningful, that is where learning and achievement flourish” (EL Education, n.d.). The organization's mission is to “create classrooms where teachers can fulfill their highest aspirations, and students achieve more than they think possible, becoming active contributors to building a better world” (EL Education, n.d.). EL's model of student achievement consists of three dimensions: mastery of knowledge and skills, character, and high-quality student work. According to EL, these dimensions prepare students for adult life and success through “quality of work and character” (EL Education, n.d.). EL weaves character development throughout the curriculum to help students develop into

effective learners, ethical citizens, and ensure they are prepared to contribute to better work. The three dimensions of achievement are fused into every module and unit. The EL curriculum is broken down into four modules in elementary grades, which is one module per quarter. Each module includes three units, and the individual units include eleven or twelve lessons. The module focuses on one topic throughout the nine weeks. An example of the meticulous planning of EL is evident in the first module of the fourth-grade framework. In the first module, *Poetry, Poets, and Becoming Writers*, students are introduced to poetry by reading a chapter book written in the form of a student's poetry journal. After the introduction, students begin analyzing poetry by famous children's poets. Finally, in the third unit, students create their own poems and apply the skills learned in the previous units as they write about what inspired them to create poetry.

When a local school system adopted this curriculum, the board members determined that teachers in grades two through five would deliver reading and language arts instruction through EL's curriculum. As a fourth-grade teacher, I worked firsthand with this curriculum and have heard the thoughts of my colleagues on this educational resource. These discussions with colleagues contributed to my interest in learning more about what other educators have experienced with the curriculum. My desire was to identify the factors that impacted teachers' beliefs and perspectives about the EL curriculum.

This study examined how these teachers experienced EL. My interest in teachers' experiences with EL derived from my personal experience with the learning content. I decided to use elementary education teachers who delivered instruction with EL because this curriculum was still relatively new to these educators. This study explored these teachers' perspectives on EL and the factors that influenced their perspective on EL.

## **Personal Experience**

Last year was my first year as a self-contained general education teacher in fourth grade. Before this transition, the fourth-grade team was departmentalized. As a fourth-grade math and science teacher, I was enthralled with math and the standards. Having a narrowed instructional focus truly excited me and enabled me to focus on unpacking the content standards and helping students acquire the necessary content knowledge and skills. I was blindsided when I found out I would be self-contained, which meant I would now teach all subjects. I remember thinking about what materials I would use to deliver instruction on language arts and writing. Since I was prepared to teach math and science, I became concerned about dissecting the reading standards. Furthermore, I questioned how I was going to deliver effective instruction aligned with these standards. I was unfamiliar with the best practices surrounding reading instruction. As a professional, I was prepared for the challenge of learning the content and standards. I was confident in relying on my craft knowledge to help me build my bridge from the unknown to competence. I was committed to finding literature my students could connect to and finding a way to deliver the content in a manner that would work best for their current abilities. I was quickly informed there was no need to start my individual planning because I would be trained on how to deliver instruction through the EL education curriculum.

I approached this study as an inside researcher. As a teacher-researcher, I brought knowledge from my personal experience with EL. I am bringing the privilege of working first hand with this curriculum to this project. Being a teacher of EL for two years, I have the background knowledge of the inner workings of this curriculum. I am considered to have insider knowledge because of how closely I work with the curriculum.

I understood that each educator's experience with EL might be different, and I used the data to learn about the experiences and perspectives of other educators. I believe our backgrounds shape our interpretations and perceptions of experiences and things we encounter. I interpreted my participant's constructions of meaning through their accounts. Speaking with participants about their experiences enabled me to understand how the EL curriculum translated to practice within their classrooms. Utilizing interviews allowed me to gain knowledge from each participant's perspective and experience. Consequently, themes emerged regarding what factors impact their perspective of EL. This study originated from many conversations among myself and my colleagues about our professional opinions on the newly adopted curriculum. I was interested in how teachers think about and view the EL curriculum.

This case study aimed to find out what teachers were thinking and their perspectives of EL curriculum. Finding the answers to my initial research question allowed me to gain insight into what teachers are thinking about EL education based on their own experiences. Additionally, I wanted to discover which factors shaped an individual teacher's beliefs and perspective of the scripted curriculum in practice. My research question was: What are teachers' perceptions of EL the scripted curriculum? My secondary question was: What factors impact how teachers perceive EL? The secondary question allowed me to gain an understanding of what factors shaped how teachers perceived the EL curriculum. Knowing that an individual teacher's beliefs and perspectives were somewhat shaped by their personal feelings, I desired to learn more about some of the common factors that impact teachers' beliefs and perspectives.

## CHAPTER 2

### Review of Relevant Literature

While there is much research on scripted curriculum, there is currently limited research regarding EL education. This case study fills a research gap by contributing to the literature addressing the EL curriculum and providing insight into teachers' perspectives about the curriculum. This literature review will take a look at what effective pedagogy is, the history of EL curriculum, and scripted curriculum.

According to Eisenbach (2012), "Creativity can be a teacher's greatest asset. In fact, one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching is often the identification and generation of engaging classroom curriculum" (p.153). Teachers are hired to educate the young minds of the future and should be trusted to do what is best for their students and allowed to utilize their craft knowledge. Allowing teachers to do this, empowers them to form a hypothesis about what is going to be the best way to instruct their students. There is literature to support craft knowledge as one of the most efficient tools to battle underperforming schools and to ensure growth for all students. Van Der Schaaf (2008) states that quality teaching is produced when competent teachers align their personal beliefs with their professional practice (craft knowledge).

Additionally, Burney (2004) argues:

If policy makers really want to cure our schools, instead of simply bandaging them where they bleed, they will need to help practitioners and researchers build a foundation of professional knowledge that incorporates researchers' findings and draws from what teachers already know and what they can learn from one another (p. 527).

According to Weingarten, "There should be an undoubted presupposition that teachers, like other professionals, know what they are doing" (as cited in Will, 2019).

## **The History of EL Education**

EL education did not specify a definitive theory that the curriculum is rooted in. However, EL education has strong proponents of the social constructivist theory. Social constructivism was developed by Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky, a student of Piaget, rejected certain aspects of constructivism theory. He thought that learning could not be separated from social experiences. Vygotsky thought learning coincided with social context. The nature of EL is very student-centered and affords students a lot of opportunities to discuss, share, question, and present their thinking and work. One example of this, students are expected to be able to hold higher-level book discussions, prepare for these discussions with facts pulled from the text, and facilitate the discussions themselves. One component that does not align with the Social Constructivist theory is the lack of student-led self discovery of topics students are interested in. Dori and Blecher (2005) state, “Social constructivist ideas enable one to investigate and support the notion that knowledge is not the property of individuals; rather it happens in a group setting, where knowledge is distributed and shared” (p. 247).

According to the EL website (EL Education, n.d.), the curriculum creators “joined the character-infused philosophy of Outward Bound founder Kurt Hahn, which focuses on teamwork, courage, and compassion with an active approach to learning crafted by leading Harvard scholars and created 10 founding principles for the EL Education model”. The 10 founding principles are self-discovery, originating wonderful ideas, being responsible for your learning, empathy and caring, success and failure, collaboration and competition, diversity and inclusion, a direct relationship with the natural world, solitude and reflection, and service and compassion (EL Education, n.d.).

The Expeditionary Learning, EL, education company has a mission statement to be, “A mission-driven, nonprofit organization that works with all kinds of schools: district and charter, from pre-K through 12th grade, serving populations that reflect the diversity of our country” (EL Education, n.d.). The company prides itself on the creation of powerful resources. The concept for EL was created in 1991 through a collaboration of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Outward Bound and received funding from the New American Schools federal initiative (EL Education, n.d.). In 1991, The New American Schools Development Corporation (NASDC) was established (Mirel, 2001). NASDC was formed as part of President Bush’s America 2000 education strategy, the New American Schools initiative was intended to create and deploy a series of break-the-mold schools that would stimulate a wholesale redesign of U.S. education, replacing a failing old model with sparkling new ones (Mirel, 2001). The concept for EL was born out of wanting to create a new model for schooling (EL Education, n.d.). By 1993, there were 10 EL schools opened across the United States (EL Education, n.d.). In 1996, funding from the New American Schools Federal initiative had stopped and EL began contracting its curriculum directly to school systems and districts (EL Education, n.d.). Over the years EL Education’s K-8 curriculum was developed into “a comprehensive, standards-based core literacy program that engages teachers and students through compelling, real world content” (Park, 2017, paragraph 5). In 2017, the company produced the K-5 Language Arts curriculum (EL Education, n.d.).

EL education was adopted by over 20 schools and school districts in the southeast United States by 2021. One of the school districts that adopted EL education during the 2017-2018 school year was Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) for a 3-year adoption. Brian Kingsley, former Assistant Superintendent for Academics at WCPSS, stated, “EL Education’s

curriculum was selected with the input of the entire community including parents, students, and district school leaders and teachers” (Park, 2017). Brian Kingsley continued on to explain why EL was chosen, “ We have clear goals that center on the development of a student-driven classroom where the 4Cs and dynamic learning experiences are visible every day. EL Education’s Language Arts Curriculum aligns with our goals and will serve as a vehicle to ensure that our students have access to learning that is both rigorous and engaging” (Park, 2017, paragraph 4).

Aarti Sharma, GCSA’s Executive Vice President of New School Development, said, “Georgia Charter Schools Association is excited to partner with EL Education in their support of high-quality charter schools in Georgia”(EL Education, 2019). Brighten Academy is one school in the Georgia Charter Schools Association that began partnering with EL Education in 2014 as a Network School and began implementing the K-8 ELA literacy curriculum (first edition) in 2017(EL Education, 2019).

There has been very limited evaluative literature produced on EL education. There are currently two external evaluation studies and these are located on the company website. There is a need for more evaluation of the company from outside sources to validate the claims of success made by the company. On the company website, there are links to “view the study” and once the link is clicked, it redirects you back to the company website. The two studies conducted by Mathematica Policy and WestED claim positive results.

The study completed by Mathematica Policy was a five year study that took a deeper look into the impact of combining the EL Education curriculum with professional development on student achievement and teacher practice (EL Education n.d.). This study claims there was an increase in student achievement in the area of English Language Arts. The information that was

shared about that study did not present any detail about how the increase was measured or what data collection tools were utilized to measure said growth. Additionally, there was no information about the demographics of the teacher participants or if teachers were self-reporting their own growth. Furthermore, it is unclear what was utilized to measure the growth of the teachers participating in the study who “showed significant growth in their general instructional practices as well as specific skills that research shows are key to higher student achievement” (EL Education n.d.).

WestED claims to have conducted a rigorous study and found achievement gains for K-2 students in Shelby County, TN in schools that were implementing the EL Education curriculum Modules and the Skills Block in just one year (EL Education, n.d.). There was not a formal research report provided on the EL website. However, the company did provide demographics for the student population that was included in the testing sample. In this study, there was specific mention of the tool used to measure growth for the study. There needs to be more evaluative research conducted on EL education with more in-depth research reports. Overall, the research that has been conducted about the effectiveness of EL does not speak to the teacher’s perspectives of the curriculum. Furthermore, the research does not address what factors could possibly impact how teachers are viewing EL.

### **Scripted Curriculum**

In this study, scripted curriculum is viewed as being a predetermined and restructured curriculum. Milner (2013) states, “Teachers are expected to rely on predetermined, scripted curriculum materials to shape their instructional practices rather than on their own professional judgment (p.163). High-stakes testing creates philosophical conflicts for teachers when they have to use instructional methods that are different from their teaching philosophy (Strinling et al.,

2015). High-stakes testing can create those philosophical conflicts for teachers if they feel they have to focus on test scores and not deliver instruction that meets the needs of their students.

Jacob (2005) asserts,

“The federal education bill, No Child Left Behind, requires states to test students in grades 3 to 8 each year and to judge school performance on the basis of these test scores. While intended to maximize student learning, there is little empirical evidence about the effectiveness of such policies” (p.761)

There is a push for equity amongst classrooms and trying to ensure all students are receiving a quality education. Milner (2003) claims, “Supporters of scripted, narrowed curriculum are in search of equality” p.166. The American educational system has been influenced by the latest ‘trend’ designed to improve teachers’ instructional capabilities and students’ learning capabilities as a means to increase achievement levels (Ainsworth et al., 2012). Teachers are being pushed to turn out higher test scores and to deliver content at a rapid pace. Counties and school districts are adopting scripted curriculums to ensure common standards are taught. “Teachers occupy a central role in the implementation of curriculum in a school district. If a newly developed curriculum is to be effective, it must be created with the teacher in mind since teachers interpret curriculum based on their knowledge, beliefs and experiences” (Ainsworth et al.,2012). Scripted curriculum became increasingly popular after the enactment of No Child Left Behind. Ede (2006) states,

One week after becoming president, George W. Bush sent Congress an education reform bill; he promised to eliminate reading inequalities and ensure that all children would read at grade level by the time they reached the 3rd grade. This would be achieved through the

use of scientifically based reading instruction. These education reforms became law when the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was passed in 2002 (p. 30).

Fitz and Nikolaidis (2020) argue, “scripted curriculum has become widely popular in both public and charter schools in the United States following the increased accountability resulting from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and, later, the implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS)” (p. 195).

While scripted curriculum has recently gained popularity, it has been used as a tool to deliver instruction for almost 200 years (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020). This provides a point of reference for when scripted curricula originated. In the mid-1800s scripted curriculum was created as a strategy for reading instruction with “elaborate lesson plans accompanied by suggestions for instructors” before transitioning into an actual script in 1888 (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020, p. 196). Scripted curriculum often receives mixed reviews from teachers. Fitz & Nikolaidis (2020) concluded that “some teachers feel that the scripts deprive them of professional autonomy” and others “find the curricula to be helpful in structuring the standards” (p.5).

There is literature surrounding the concerns that come along with a scripted curriculum. Ede (2006) brings up a striking concern about gifted learners and struggling students both receiving the support they need from a scripted curriculum. “Reading aloud scripted lessons that have been created for a generic group is unlikely to accomplish this goal” (Ede, 2006, p.32). Ede (2006) follows up with a compelling argument about a shift towards rote memorization and test-driven instruction and the negative impact that will have on students developing critical thinking and comprehension skills.

## **Effective Pedagogy**

Academic achievement, social and emotional development, development of technical skills, and overall ability to contribute to society are all positive outcomes that can be birthed from effective pedagogy (Westbrook et al., 2013). The term “effective” is subject to individual interpretation. Effective teachers use effective teaching practices such as a variety of instructional practices, a variety of learning materials and resources, a variety of question types, and pay attention to the progression of learning (Westbrook et al., 2013). Effective pedagogy is doing what is best for student learning and growth to take place. Ensuring the content and resources are manageable and prepared for student consumption is an important aspect of instruction.

Effective pedagogy ensures students are engaged, understand the standards and content being presented, and encourages students to actively participate and learn (Westbrook et al., 2013). In order for students to remain engaged and actively participating with learning, modifications and adjustments have to be made to the content, resources, and pacing if necessary. Furthermore, operating in flexibility ensures educators are making the best decisions to address student needs. According to Westbrook et al. (2013), students should be the central focus as educators construct the teaching-learning process.

According to research from Tsui (2002),

Rather than devote so much effort to teaching students what to think, perhaps we need to do more to teach them how to think. Higher-order cognitive skills, such as the ability to think critically, are invaluable to students' futures; they prepare individuals to tackle a multitude of challenges that they are likely to face in their personal lives, careers, and duties as responsible citizens. Moreover, by instilling critical thinking in students we

groom individuals to become independent lifelong learners-thus fulfilling one of the long-term goals of the educational enterprise. (p.740)

Teaching students critical thinking skills through our instruction is more important than teaching students what to think. Through the utilization of effective pedagogy, we are ensuring that students' individual needs are met. Differentiation is one way that we can ensure students are receiving content on their current level and it is presented in a way that they will be able to make meaning of it. Tsui (2002) states, "In order to optimize learning, a critical balance must be struck between subject matter breadth and depth" (p.755). Effective teaching must encompass a balance of content and the exploration of the content. Teacher utilization of craft knowledge ensures they are able to provide the right resources, lesson delivery, and extension or remediation of a topic at the appropriate pace and time. Effective pedagogy ensures that pupils are provided with the skills and knowledge required to engage in age appropriate curriculum but also that the individual needs of the pupils are met (Delf, 2017).

### **Effective Pedagogy and EL Curriculum**

EL curriculum infuses rigor into the content and assignments. EL does require critical thinking skills when completing the close readings, character analysis, and research projects. Therefore, EL does encompass some major components of effective pedagogy. However, because of EL's nature, there are other components of effective pedagogy being neglected. EL requires teachers to read from a manual and comes with preselected text and materials. Most educators are going to have many different learning styles present in a heterogeneous classroom, thus there will be a need for a variety of learning materials and resources. Teachers will need to utilize a variety of question types and pay attention to the progression of learning (Westbrook et al., 2013). Thus, an essential component of effective pedagogy is the ability of educators to make

the necessary adjustments for the benefit of student learning. EL does not allow itself to be changed to accommodate the immediate needs of one's students. From review EL has components of scripted curriculum such as materials for students and teachers prepared, assessments are prepared and predetermined pacing.

Through this research, I hoped to gain insight into what teachers' perspectives of EL are and which factors impact the perspective of EL curriculum. Through exploring effective pedagogy and EL, there seems to be a slight mismatch between the two. My research filled the void of literature on teachers' perspectives of the curriculum and what factors impact their perspectives. Through this study I also wanted to uncover if teachers viewed EL as a scripted curriculum due to the nature of the curriculum.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Qualitative Approach**

Qualitative research was appropriate for this study because I hoped to gain a complex, detailed understanding of how teachers are thinking and feeling about EL education. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), “This detail [the complex, detailed understanding] can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes or places of work, and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature” (p. 45). The use of qualitative methods, such as a case study, allowed me to engage deeply with the collection of data, analysis of data, and allowed for the natural emergence of the themes. Researchers are a key instrument in qualitative methods (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) state, “The qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants”. Qualitative research allowed me to acknowledge and present multiple realities because there is no singular teacher experience. Qualitative researchers attempt to make sense of or interpret phenomenon by studying their natural settings and “turn[ing] the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self” (Denzin & Lincoln as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 7). This process helped me make sense of participants’ experiences. Qualitative research was appropriate because it allowed me to construct knowledge based on the accounts of the participants.

#### **Case Study**

I utilized a single instrumental case study approach. I wanted to focus on the participants’ perspective of EL. Rashid et al. (2019) states, “A case study is concerned with describing real-

life phenomena rather than developing normative statements” (p. 5). Using the case study approach allowed me to get a current, in-depth understanding of a teacher’s perspective of EL curriculum through the lens of their individual experience. According to Rashid et al. (2019), “Case study research consists of a detailed investigation, often with empirical material collected over a period of time from a well-defined case to provide an analysis of the context and processes involved in the phenomenon” (p. 5).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The constructivist theoretical framework was utilized throughout this study. I believe people construct meaning and understanding based on their personal experiences. Therefore, I knew it was important to allow the participants to share their experience with EL and allow them to construct the meaning of their experiences. Teachers gain craft knowledge through their experiences in the classroom. The knowledge and experiences of the teachers will also impact their perspective of EL. A teacher’s perspective is developed through their experiences, be it positive or negative. According to Creswell and Poth (2008), it was important for me as the researcher to understand the experiences shared by the participants. I desired to interpret the findings in a way that was true to what each participant shared. There are factors that impacted the individual teachers’ perception of the curriculum. The participants were allowed to reveal the factors that impacted and influenced their perspectives. Allowing participants to share their perspectives and experiences gave them the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and gave voice to their reality. According to Burney (2004):

Teachers, like doctors, already possess a great deal of craft knowledge — a mixture of expertise, theories, propositions, and tacit knowledge applied in the daily conduct of their practice. They have developed it by dealing with students who come from varying social

and economic backgrounds and who have different motivations, attitudes, abilities, and cultural experiences. Teachers account for these differences in their teaching while simultaneously juggling multiple tasks and classroom routines. They pace a lesson so that it fits the time allowed. They keep order. They pass out papers, guide discussions, address the needs and questions of individual students, soothe frustrations, and quell conflicts. They take mental notes: What elements of a lesson are the hardest? What aspects need more time or less? What is being understood? Which students need what kind of help? What explanations seem to work and for whom? (p.527)

Therefore, I allowed the participants of this study to construct the knowledge and I analyzed their knowledge to make meaning out of it. According to Ede (2006), “Curriculum must be flexible so that teachers are able to construct lessons that will be of high interest to their unique group of students, and actively engage them in creating knowledge” (p. 32). Teachers construct learning opportunities for their students and this is done by their recognition of students' needs. Participants discussed how they constructed these opportunities with EL, this in turn revealed the pieces that are impacting their perception of EL and what factors impacted their instructional decisions in the classroom.

### **Participant Sampling**

This study was open to those who were teaching English/Language Arts in grades 2-5 utilizing the EL curriculum to students. Convenience sampling was employed in this study because I needed access to participants with whom I already had established a rapport. “Before the collection of empirical material, it is useful if the researcher knows the cases well and the participants who will be approached. This ensures a smooth process and builds a rapport among the researchers and participants (Rashid et al., 2019, p. 5). I also needed to ensure the

participants would have the time and willingness to participate in the two semi-structured interviews and would be willing to submit an artifact for the document analysis. Three participants were selected to be in this study.

### **Participants**

Each participant in this study had two to four years of experience with the EL curriculum and was delivering reading and language arts instruction through EL education at the time of the study. In the table below, participant demographics have been listed in a manner that will provide information about each participant but does not include any identifiable information.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographic Data.*

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Years as an educator	9 years	11 years	8 years
Years delivering reading instruction	7 years	10 years	4 years
Years delivering instruction through EL	4 years	2 years	2 years
Race	White	White	African American
Age	36	34	29
Sex	Female	Female	Female
Student Population	Small ESL groups	ESL and Read to achieve students	General Education, Exceptional Children, and Read to Achieve

### **Data Collection Methods**

I utilized semi-structured interviews and document analysis to collect data in this study. The process of triangulation involves using evidence from different sources to shed light on

themes and perspectives (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Utilizing more than one method of data collection allowed me to triangulate the data. Collecting multiple sources of data allowed me to corroborate evidence and findings. Rashid et al. (2019) states, “collecting empirical material from multiple sources allows for triangulation of the data” (p.6).

I completed two rounds of semi-structured interviews; one before the document analysis and one after the document analysis. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, I was able to focus on specific questions and this allowed me to provide some flexibility to my participants. In semi-structured interviewing, a guide is used, with questions and topics that must be covered. According to Harrell & Bradley (2009)

[When using semi-structured interviews] The interviewer has some discretion about the order in which questions are asked, but the questions are standardized, and probes may be provided to ensure that the researcher covers the correct material. This kind of interview collects detailed information in a style that is somewhat conversational. Semi-structured interviews are often used when the researcher wants to delve deeply into a topic and to understand thoroughly the answers provided. (p.27)

Semi-structured interviews were appropriate because they afford me the freedom to allow the participants' answers to guide the flow of conversation.

I used document analysis to get a deeper look at what markings the participants made or noted in their artifact. I was able to look directly at what words they circled, highlighted, or crossed out, and how they made meaning of the curriculum. Bowen (2009) states, “Document analysis is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation” (p.28). Evaluating the markings on these documents provided insight into where and how the participant's craft knowledge is expressed while delivering instruction through EL.

Participants used the EL manuals to deliver instruction daily. The teachers participated in a weekly planning period that allowed them to discuss the lessons and review the embedded questions for each day. These teachers were expected to deliver the same lesson at the same pace as their team members in a lockstep sequence. Within their planning meetings, teachers were documenting information, eliminating information, and adding materials and resources to their plans. Therefore, analyzing these artifacts gave insight into how the participants are making meaning of their experience of delivering instruction through EL. Bowen (2009) asserts, “Documents provide background and context, additional questions to be asked, supplementary data, a means of tracking change and development, and verification of finding from other data sources” (p. 31).

After engaging with the documents, I was able to ask the participants about specific examples in the follow-up interview to get a deeper understanding of what those curricular decisions represented and their rationale for certain markings. Furthermore, their perspective of certain aspects of EL were revealed through the document analysis. Taking a deeper look at their perspectives of certain aspects of EL uncovered what impacted their thoughts or decisions.

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed my data with inductive coding. I began with an initial round of coding which included reading the data and organizing it. The initial round of coding allowed me to get familiar with the data and to further break down the data into small chunks. Through the first round of coding, I was able to begin identifying patterns. After I completed my first round of coding, I moved into round two, which allowed me to categorize my codes. While categorizing the codes, it allowed me to identify larger categories. Round three of coding allowed me to recognize the overarching themes. The subcategories supported each theme. Employing multiple

rounds of coding ensured I engaged deeply with the data. While reviewing the data, I started making generalizations about the participants' perspectives and what factors impact their perspective of EL.

Additionally, I used member checking as one method to strive for validity during my case study. My process for member checking was to take the documents back to each participant to ensure my inferences about their statements were correct and aligned to what the participant stated. I created a chart that had the specific quote on one side and my interpretation of the quote on the other side. My reason for doing this was to ensure I was comprehending exactly what was shared by each participant. Through member checking, I ensured there was no misunderstanding about what the participants wanted to share or exactly what was meant by the participants. I wanted to ensure my themes were as accurate as possible.

### **Ethical Considerations**

To protect all participants, participants were assigned a number upon signing and emailing their signed adult consent form. This number was used throughout this study. All participants were informed that they could have withdrawn from this study at any time. All participants received fair and ethical treatment during every step of this study. Finally, I ensured I had a signed consent form from all participants.

Due to the nature of the study, it was imperative that I did everything possible to keep the participants' personal information confidential. There was the risk of possibly being reidentified from a pool of over 90,000 public school teachers in the respective southeastern state.

### **Research Context**

This study took place over the course of the spring semester of the 2020-2021 school year. To ensure the anonymity of all participants, the school names were not disclosed. This

study took place in a Southeast state in the United States. To gather insight on the participants' perspective of EL, the participants were engaged in interviews to gain an understanding of their teaching philosophy. I held the follow-up interview after completing the document analysis to gain further insight as to what led the participants to certain instructional decisions during the lessons. Moreover, the data collected in the first interview was used to help refine the questions asked in the follow-up interview. The purpose of my case study was to understand what factors impact one's perspective of EL as a scripted curriculum. Knowing what factors impact and influence a teacher's perspective of EL will allow curriculum specialists, principals, and stakeholders to make the best decisions when creating parameters for instruction utilizing a scripted curriculum.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this case study was to uncover which factors impact teachers' perspectives of EL curriculum. Employing the use of semi-scripted interviews and document analysis allowed me to acquire detailed and thick descriptions. The results from this study were discovered through the employment of inductive coding. I completed three rounds of coding to ensure I was allowing themes to emerge naturally. During data analysis, I recognized repeated phrases and keywords as codes. After completing multiple rounds of coding, I was able to identify which codes aligned with specific categories. Participant quotes and descriptions were used to uncover the answers to the research questions, and through the coding process, two themes developed. During the semi-structured interviews, it became apparent each teacher's experiences were influenced by the implementation within the school building and their perception of the student experience with the EL curriculum. These factors led to important implications for school leaders and districts that employ scripted curriculum as a mandated expectation for classroom teachers. Therefore, the findings of this research have been divided into two categories: implementation expectations and student experience.

### **Participant Data**

Quotes included in this section have been member-checked to ensure the quotes accurately depict what the participant intended. Convenience sampling was employed in this study to ensure there was time to schedule interviews and members checking with participants. Member checking was included to establish credibility.

At the beginning of each semi-structured interview, each participant was asked to list three words to describe the EL curriculum. In the table below, you will see the three words shared by each participant.

**Table 2**

*Participants Three Words to Describe EL Curriculum.*

Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Planned out	Scripted	Challenging
Organized	Rigorous	Rigor
Rigorous	Not Enjoyable	Lack of differentiation
	Difficult	

During the interview, participant two gave an additional word. Participant two's additional word was "difficult," as included in Table 1.

Table 2 consists of the overarching themes of the study. The codes used to help code the information for each theme is included in the table. Additionally, the frequency of each code is included. The codes and themes emerged from inductive coding.

**Table 3**

*Codes, Themes, and Frequencies.*

Themes	Codes included in the theme	The number of times each code was used
Implementation expectations	Rigorous	8
	Planned out/ Preparation	5
	Difficult	9
	Lesson Delivery	4
	Materials/Resources	8
	Modifications and adjustments	9

**Table 3** (continued)

	Teacher autonomy	7
	Flexibility	5
	Pre-teaching	2
	Organized	4
	Scripted	11
	Implementation with fidelity	2
Student experiences	Difficult	9
	Task times	5
	Ability level	3
	Student needs	8
	Demands on students	3
	Student engagement	7
	Lack of differentiation	9
	Background knowledge	4

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Based on feedback from IRB, the participants' artifacts could not be included in the reporting of the study due to the nature of the information shared. The IRB board thought that including copies of the original artifacts may have revealed too much identifiable information about the participants and their respective school districts. I worked around this concern by including Table 4. Table 4 consists of a brief description of each artifact and the markings and information written, provided, or shared by each participant.

**Table 4***Document Analysis Data.*

Participant Number	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Artifact submitted	Planning Document	Lesson plan/ teacher manual copy	Reflection on lesson taught
Artifact description	The planning document included multiple stages of this participant's planning process. There was a gridded calendar that included dates, module/ lesson numbers, and an overview of what will be completed in each lesson.	The lesson plan submitted by this participant was the lesson from the teacher manual. The participant made markings on the margins and highlighted information she needed to remember or deemed important.	Participant three submitted a typed reflection after delivering a lesson from EL. Participant three included information about preparation for the lesson, lesson delivery, and resources needed.
Markings on the artifact	<p>Modifications and adjustments were made to the delivery of the lesson, content focus, and assessments for the next week.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the gridded calendar teacher wrote Lesson 4 add a model of writing multiple complete sentences to create a paragraph. There was a content focus change noted. (Minus adding in descriptive words, add in complete sentence practice)</li> <li>Organizing and delving into the lessons that were to be taught over the next week.</li> </ul>	<p>Modifications and adjustments were made to the amount of time spent on the close read and character analysis paragraph.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher wrote + 20mins to the time near the close read and + 10mins to the character analysis paragraph.</li> </ul> <p>Participant 2 marked page numbers and examples she wanted to discuss.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant two wrote page numbers 56-61 in the module workbook.</li> <li>Wrote in the margins: Make inferences about characters' feelings made by looking at what characters say.</li> </ul> <p>Teacher included an additional passage to be read for homework.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wrote at the top of the lesson plan: Remember to discuss homework once it is passed out.</li> </ul>	<p>Teacher wrote about teaching an additional mini lesson about writing a complete summary. Teacher listed things students needed to include. The teacher wrote about creating a model summary to share with students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher added a mini lesson to the beginning of the lesson to model the proper way to create a summary and what information needs to be included.</li> </ul> <p>Teacher created an additional time for students to peer check the summary they wrote.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the summary, the participant wrote + 25 mins to time for summary writing. This would allow students to get immediate feedback about their summaries.</li> </ul>

### **Implementation Expectations**

According to the participants, expectations surrounding the implementation of a scripted curriculum often are a trickle-down effect. County/district designees, curriculum evaluators, superintendents, curriculum specialists, and other essential stakeholders set forth a list of expectations regarding the implementation. Additionally, I gathered from data collection that each school in the county or district was supposed to abide by those expectations. Participants two and three shared that the principals and coaches in their schools were responsible for ensuring that all educators in the school consistently implement the curriculum with fidelity. While listening to the interviews and reviewing transcriptions, it was evident each teacher had a somewhat unique experience with the implementation expectations set forth by their respective districts or counties. This information further proves what Fitz and Nikolaidis (2020) asserted about "... the manner in which scripted curriculum is used varies widely from school to school, meaning that both teachers' and students' experiences and performance cannot cleanly be compared across schools or districts" (p.198). The differences in the implementation expectations seemed to arise from how individual principals chose to present and enforce the expectations.

### **Teacher Planning and Preparation**

One component of implementation for a scripted curriculum is the planning and preparation of teachers. This process is an essential factor that impacts teachers' perspectives. As with any change, teachers need time to adjust to the changes and the disequilibrium they may be experiencing with the new curriculum. In connection with the recent curriculum changes, educators need time to delve into the curriculum and gain a full scope of the topics and standards they will teach to students. The Integrated Learning Framework utilized by mentor coaches

identifies seven elements for promoting positive transformations in performance. Among the elements, continuity determines that at least four to six months are needed for significant developmental changes in teacher performance. Teachers cannot effectively deliver instruction if they are not provided adequate planning time to prepare for their lessons. Two participants discussed the impact of not being able to explore the curriculum before it was implemented fully.

Participant 2 states,

I feel that we did not have enough time to truly dig in and prepare by exploring the curriculum the first year it was implemented. We were given two days of training and then sent off to prepare to begin delivering instruction on day one of the school year. It was extremely difficult to wrap my head around the context of each lesson, how the units flowed, and all of the components of the lessons. I felt that I was spending so much time preparing and reading the script the night before the lesson or that morning as soon as I got to work.

Similarly, participant one stated, “I felt like the first year we kind of looked at each lesson as an isolated lesson because we were overwhelmed with it and didn’t have the time to view it as a whole unit or a whole module.” Ensuring teachers are getting the necessary training and professional development is imperative for teachers to feel confident in their ability to teach utilizing the curriculum. Joyce and Showers, in their 1998 meta-analysis, found that the transfer of skills to the classroom occurred when the following conditions are in place: teachers are allowed to practice the new content and receive informative feedback on their practice (Joyce & Showers, 2002). The quotes from the participants spoke to the need for educators to be offered the opportunity to explore a curriculum before delivering instruction thoroughly. This practice allows them to get a complete understanding of the components of the curriculum.

To prepare for the delivery of each lesson, teachers need the opportunity to explore the time estimates set for each component of the lesson. Additionally, teachers need ample opportunity to explore the teacher manuals, assessments, student materials, text for each unit, etc. All three participants spoke about some phase of their planning process. Planning and the planning process for these participants seemed to have an impact on how they viewed EL.

Participant one shared,

Now I feel like we're able to do that [view it as a whole unit/a whole module] a lot better. So when we plan a specific lesson, now it's within the context of the specific unit that they're working on. So understanding what they've done the day before, what they'll do the day after, and it's a lot more like linked together. So, usually, we'll think about what they did in the previous lesson, what they will do in the next lesson, I will make certain adjustments as needed to the lesson that we're asked to look at.

The artifact participant one submitted was an overview of the planning process that they cycle through every time they attend their weekly extended planning. Participant one shared that their school implemented extended planning sessions once a week for each grade level after the first year of implementation based on feedback from teachers.

Throughout the interviews with all participants, there was a common trend regarding planning and preparing for instruction before delivering the lesson. Participant three also shared that there is a weekly planning session for all teachers on a grade level. Participant three states,

The expectation set forth by the administration is that we look over the EL lessons before coming to planning. We look over the lessons, we come to planning and are prepared to discuss what we saw in the lesson, what the standard that aligns to the lessons are, what the I can statements are. What do our students need for the lessons? What are we going to

focus on during that lesson? We kind of dig into the text that we're looking at. We make sure we write down page numbers of the pages in the student workbook, and pages we need in our teaching manuals. At the very beginning of EL when it was first implemented in our school, we spent a ton of time actually like reading through the lessons and spending time like truly, just, you know, like combing through what the curriculum was wanting? What is the end goal? What are the students going to be doing? To actually be prepared for EL, it takes a lot of prep work, the work done before you even teach it. It takes a lot of preparation time. We spend so much time reading through the actual lesson because it is so scripted.

To ensure teachers are delivering lessons effectively, teachers need the opportunity to plan and prepare. If teachers are expected to deliver the lessons with fidelity, then they must be provided with the time to gain an in-depth understanding of the curriculum.

### **Teacher Autonomy**

Teachers use autonomy to decide what will be most useful or most valuable from the curriculum given time constraints and student abilities. Teacher autonomy is an essential factor that impacts how teachers feel about their role as an educator. Teacher autonomy is rooted in craft knowledge. Teachers use their craft knowledge to make informed decisions about what will yield the best results in student understanding and growth. Allowing educators to make informed choices and decisions rooted in their prior education and classroom experience empowers them to facilitate genuinely tailored learning to their specific students. This practice coincides with the literature presented in chapter two. Fitz and Nikolaidis (2020) assert, "we advocate for increased professional autonomy of teachers, particularly over their curriculum and its implementation" (p.3). Empowering teachers to make informed decisions about the scripted curriculum content,

instructional strategies, and materials ensures students receive instruction that best fits their needs.

Participants indicated their autonomy was stifled when they had to deliver instruction directly from the EL teacher manual. Each participant discussed their desires to make modifications and adjustments to the EL curriculum, which ultimately impacted their curriculum perspectives. This aligns with the literature from Parsons et al. (2017), which asserts teacher autonomy and the ability to effectively make curricular decisions increase student learning because the learning is tailored to the specific needs of those students. Teacher autonomy consists of the flexibility to change and adjust lesson delivery, content, and assignments to better serve students. Codes from participant data included in this section are teacher autonomy, modifications and adjustments, and flexibility.

Included as modifications and adjustments were changes made to materials, the delivery of the lessons, and assessments. If teachers feel more comfortable and supported making modifications and adjustments, they seem to have a more pleasurable and positive outlook of the EL curriculum. Participants expected to deliver content directly from the teacher manual and only utilizing EL resources acknowledged having a more challenging or negative experience with EL. The participants that felt supported in utilizing their craft knowledge to make decisions about EL in the context of their classroom felt more comfortable with the curriculum. Participant three stated,

Challenging is the first word that I stated, it would definitely be on all parts. So challenging as a teacher, challenging for the students. Um, it's a very challenging curriculum to implement. It is so scripted. It doesn't offer a lot of like teacher

individuality to be shown, or teacher autonomy to be shown through the delivery of the lessons.

Making modifications and adjustments is one way teachers customize the curriculum to fit the needs of students. The presentation of the curriculum and expectations with implementation mean teachers may not always feel they have the authority to adapt the curriculum to meet their students' needs. Effective pedagogy consists of making the necessary adjustments and modifications to ensure students are receiving instruction. Participant one stated,

The editing focus that EL education gives might be adding descriptive language or something like that to a writing piece. If that's on the assessment, then we'll make sure that is like the revising focus of what we teach. If that's not on the assessment, we might change the revising focus to match students' needs. If our students are not really writing in complete sentences or actually separating each idea with a period, we're probably going to focus on that and not on adding descriptive language, because that's a much more fundamental need that needs to be met.

These quotes support the assertion made by Parsons et al.(2017), "educators adjust their teaching according to the social, linguistic, cultural, and instructional needs of their students" (p. 205).

Participant two shares,

We don't have a lot of grace, or flexibility, or at least that's the way it's come across us so we very much try to stick to the script and stick to this is what needs to be done. This is how it needs to be done, and, you know, if your kids aren't really getting it, we're expected to still continue on and so we don't basically get to make many changes and adaptations to make it just fit our students, which has been very difficult for my class. Because my class, even though there are a lot of supports with EI students within EI, my

kids still could use a lot more and so because of the way it's always been presented to us through our team culture, we aren't necessarily able to make as many changes as we probably could be or need to be making.

Participant two's quote speaks to educators being between the proverbial rock and a hard place. Educators feel the need to make the necessary adjustments to ensure student learning occurs, but they are expected to implement the curriculum with fidelity.

Additionally, participant one provided insight into her thoughts on the implementation and modifications associated with EL,

I think that overall it is a great curriculum but if teachers don't have the flexibility to do what they need with it, it won't be effective. So, like the fact that it's a scripted curriculum, doesn't make it ineffective. If we're being told to implement it exactly as it said, then that's a poor decision by district leaders that have adopted this curriculum. I like to view it as a guide and a suggestion. I don't know if that's the intended purpose or not. I don't know if scripted curriculums literally expect teachers to say and do every single thing in there, or if the company wrote this as a model and expects us to make adjustments as needed. So I think that difference is huge. That if we're expected to use it as a guide to meet the needs of our students, it's really good if we're expected to follow it bullet by bullet and make things take 10 minutes it says 10 minutes when we really a 25 minutes, then it's a poor decision to implement a curriculum like that. It's really not the curriculum itself, it is certain factors of implementation I think that'll make a huge difference on if it's successful or not.

Ensuring teachers have the flexibility to deliver instruction in a beneficial way for students is extremely important.

All three teachers discussed reducing the EL workload to accommodate their students. The flexibility to make the necessary changes impacts how educators feel about the curriculum. Participant three states,

I take into account what are the language demands on the students for this lesson. So for a lot of the reading lessons, it might be certain vocabulary, sometimes grammatical structures, things like that. Often, we'd like to put a vocabulary preview in all block the day before. So in lesson eight if they need to understand the specific words, I'll just use the example of frogs again, words like pollywog and canopy in a rainforest, we pre-teach in all block or for morning work.

Participant three provided an example of the flexibility needed to make this curriculum work best for their students. Participant three asserts flexibility is necessary to make the skills and learning obtainable for all students. This statement was echoed by participant two. These participants discuss flexibility being seen in lesson delivery and assignments. Teachers need the flexibility to do what is best for their students.

### **The Student Experience**

The theme of the student experience consists of the participants' perceptions of the student experience related to areas of rigor, student needs, background knowledge, engagement, and the impact of pacing. It was often challenging to decouple codes between implementation expectations and the student experience because the participants spoke from their interpretation of the student experience through their implementation lens. The participants' shared their views on the student experience based on their discussions with student, observations of student while working with EL assessments and assignments, and their own personal experiences of implementation and the impact it had on the student experience.

## **Rigor**

Each participant used the word rigor when describing the EL curriculum in three words (Table 1). There were varied perceptions of how rigor impacted the student experience.

Participant one stated,

The tasks that the students are asked to do are very like challenging and rigorous to them, both the reading test and the writing tests, sometimes in a good way and sometimes in a slightly overwhelming way, but rigorous.

This quote from participant one gives insight into how EL can challenge students and includes rigorous tasks; however, the rigor infused by EL may hinder student learning.

Participant three shares,

EL is definitely a rigorous curriculum. The rigor can be a bit overwhelming and over the top at times. I do not feel that students get the opportunity to truly work with standards and skills enough. The text complicity is one example of students being constantly challenged. Another example, students are often asked to participate in “debates”. Not only share their point of view but extend, expand what others are saying. Asking questions for clarification. It can be a bit much for students who need additional time to simply understand the content.

All three participants discussed the amount of rigor for students with the EL curriculum.

However, it was mentioned that the rigor contributed substantially to students’ disequilibrium and resulted in changes to student engagement.

## Student Needs

Student ability levels play a role in how students engage with learning. As the educators revealed, the ability levels of their students and the lack of differentiation in the curriculum impact how students experience EL.

Participant three shares,

I think, you know, there are parts of it that are good for all students or parts of it, that may be good for, you know, all students, but it just doesn't provide a lot of support resources. Like your lower-level text for the students who maybe aren't able to access that higher-level reading independently, and it doesn't allow them to be successful while reading independently. So I just think that the lack of differentiation for our students and even for our teaching styles in our individual classrooms, I think that lack of differentiation is definitely evident in a school that you have such diverse learners.

Participant three's assertion about the lower-level text and students not being able to access the higher-level text brings into question the equity amongst various learners. All students instructed through the EL curriculum should have access to text that will allow them to demonstrate their knowledge and skill acquisition.

Participants questioned the flexibility to meet students' needs tied to implementation.

Participant two states,

EL may have been written in a way that it would be or should be flexible, and it may just be that the atmosphere of my school. The way it's been presented to my team is that it's not flexible and not meant to be modified. I definitely don't see a lot of differentiation in the way it should be for students.

Over the course of the interviews, participants initially felt their hands were tied in differentiating the materials and were required to implement the curriculum exactly as it was written. Over time, participant one's administrator provided more room for differentiation and lightened the implementation expectation based on student data. The other two participants were not allowed this flexibility to meet student needs. In all, participant perception of meeting students' needs through the EL curriculum impacted participant perception.

### **Background Knowledge**

Students utilize background knowledge to help them make connections from previous learning to the current topics and standards. When students do not have prior information or knowledge to pull from, they are at a disadvantage. Participant two spoke about how their students did not have the proper background knowledge to comprehend the introductory lessons of the American Revolution. Participant two said,

The third unit is about the American Revolution, and I do kind of make modifications to the lesson, especially when we start the very first unit. We give a lot of background knowledge because our kids are missing a lot of that and because I'm a social studies person I try to, you know, elaborate and explain and so for me those beginning lessons of that unit really take a long time. I really elaborate on things with the American Revolution, and try and give them a reference point. It's been great during the pandemic we could during recess or during lunch, we could watch Liberty's kids which is a historical fiction cartoon of what they're learning about it. It gives them a little more background knowledge, at least enough to understand the topic. A lot of our lower level ability kids, they're really missing that background knowledge and a lot of them struggle. Normally, it's something that's already rigorous, and then on top of that not have the

knowledge to help them understand the new topic, is a lot. Often students start to lose interest and continue struggling with that topic.

Participant three was asked what they consider when making instructional decisions, and they expounded on their thought process. One of the things taken into consideration by participant three was students' background knowledge and how to ensure all students have the knowledge needed to be successful during the lesson. Participant three states,

I think a lot about if my students have the background knowledge, they need to be successful. So one thing I know, I've noticed about EL over the last two years of implementing it, they assume that the students have the background knowledge they need to be successful in the lessons. So if students have been exposed to EL before, as some of the things they've implemented, it's easier to do but if you have students that are not familiar with EL, or students that you know don't know what a noun is, and you're working with nouns and putting together like complete sentences when you are doing those things. If students don't have that background knowledge, I definitely have to kind of pre-teach them for that before I can teach that lesson in order to make sure they have the tools to be successful.

Participants often felt students did not have the prior knowledge needed with the content of the materials to accurately demonstrate their mastery of the skills within each EL lesson.

### **Engagement**

All of the participants' perceptions of the student experience culminate in concerns about student engagement. In their meta-analysis of over 11,000 pieces of literature, Wang et al. (1993) found student engagement had a positive effect size (0.38) on student achievement. Overall, participants felt discontent about how their students could engage with the material in the EL

curriculum. If student engagement is low, educators will have a more challenging time deciphering if the instruction they are delivering has a positive impact on student learning.

Participant one enjoys the student engagement embedded into the EL curriculum. That is evident in this statement,

That's one of the things that I like the most about this curriculum is that it does have constant student engagement. They often utilize a total participation strategy, you know think-pair-share, back-to-back chat, something like that so that instead of just my students sitting there waiting for other students to be called on, all students are participating in answering the questions. So, you know you're asking questions about whatever text they've read, every student has to answer that question with a partner, and then a few students will also answer that question out loud for the class. So I think that keeps the students very engaged.

Participant two had a different experience with student engagement. Participant two alluded to the fact that student engagement has suffered during distant learning. However, they noted their students often would not participate in a meaningful way prior to remote learning. Participant two shared,

Well they're supposed to be doing a lot of things throughout it there's a lot of things and it takes a lot of time for them to do the assignments, you know, finding the gist, analyzing characters, filling out lots and lots of graphic organizers, which has been interesting, during the pandemic to do those things virtually. There were things that like, you know when we worked on text-based questions even in person and had the text in front of them. They would be handwriting their responses to the questions, it took them forever to do it. And now, the struggle is not so much that it takes them forever, it's the

getting them to do it part. They're supposed to be doing a lot but because of the virtual world we're in right now it's just become very difficult for them to complete a lot of those tasks I mean, so there's a lot of challenges within EL for them already, and then you add that virtual option, it is even more challenging to them.

Based on the responses of participants one and two, the amount of student engagement does play an important role in the delivery of the lesson. Curriculum pacing impacts the student experience in how much time the curriculum grants for students to engage with a topic.

Curriculum pacing also links back to modifications and adjustments. If teachers notice student frustration or exhaustion, changes should be made to ensure students remain engaged.

Participant two asserts,

My children just are not interested in it [the curriculum], they're burnt out on the way it does things over and over and over, or it jumps, you know, from one thing to another, so quickly. It's like they either need more time on an activity or they spend, you know, five lessons on one activity. They're very bored with the topics and the things that go along with it.

While participants felt student engagement was low in large group settings with the EL curriculum, participant one shared their thoughts on EL helping their ESL students,

Overall I really do like the total participation strategies, And that actually aligns with, like, ESL lesson delivery really well because one of the ESL things, is speaking, listening, speaking, reading, writing, and often in school reading and writing or emphasize and listening and speaking, you know, it's kind of assumed that they just know how to do that already. So I think this curriculum has a lot of benefits for ESL students in terms of the engagement that they're always listening to somebody else say it,

so they're hearing that language model, and then they have to say it themselves, to help their engagement and their language development.

Participant one identified positive aspects of the EL curriculum with regard to small group teaching. This finding could not be explored more fully with the other participants as they only teach in large group settings.

Student engagement is a major contributing factor to student success. It is imperative students engage deeply with the content they are being instructed upon. If there are barriers in the way, we must do our best to help remove those barriers and give all students the best opportunity to learn. Student engagement is shaped by student background knowledge, student needs, and the rigor infused into the lessons. Student engagement is malleable and responsive to changes in students' academic settings (Bae & Lai, 2020).

### **Summary of Findings**

As I began to gather and analyze the study's data, I identified various themes.

*Implementation expectations* and *the student experience* were my overarching themes. All other elements fell into those two categories. *Implementation expectations* included time and preparation teachers need to prepare for instruction through EL and teacher autonomy. Teacher autonomy includes flexibility, modifications, and adjustments made to the curriculum. The student experience theme encompasses the rigor and pacing of the curriculum. The rigor aspect of the curriculum has an impact on student engagement and student success. The background knowledge and ability of the students also impact the student experience. All of these factors influenced how the individual teachers perceive the EL curriculum. Therefore, the participants were able to identify the major factors that impacted how they felt about the curriculum.

The findings of this case study are not generalizable due to the nature of the study. These findings give insight into what impacted these participants' perspectives. Thus participants' perceptions will be unique. Their viewpoint of EL will be shaped by external factors such as implementation expectations and the experiences of their students. Additionally, the background and experiences of the teachers will have a possible impact on their perspective.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study has provided insight into some factors that impact teachers' perception of EL curriculum, whether positive or negative. This case study offered three elementary school teachers the opportunity to discuss their perspectives of EL. In doing so, these teachers allowed me to uncover some of the factors that impact the shaping and molding of their perspectives. In this study, semi-structured interviews and document analysis were utilized to gather the data used to inform this study. Multiple data collection tools were used to allow triangulation of data.

### **Teacher Perceptions of EL Curriculum**

Across the three participants, they had similar experiences in making modifications and adjustments and planning and pacing. Those experiences fall under the implementation of the EL curriculum theme. All three participants experienced making modifications and adjustments to EL curriculum, whether it was pacing, materials, content focus, delivery of instruction, etc., in some capacity. Additionally, making informed decisions about aspects of one's teaching is directly related to teacher autonomy. According to Prichard and Moore (2016), "teacher autonomy can be defined as a teacher's freedom to make decisions concerning what is taught and how it is taught" (p.192). Therefore, all participants shared some aspect of their experience where they make informed decisions about content and its delivery. That does not mean these educators are doing so because the decisions made with teacher autonomy were supported by administration and district leaders; it means they are doing what is necessary for student growth and success.

Experiences around student engagement varied based on person-specific situations. For example, teaching in a small group versus whole group setting provided different perspectives on student engagement with the content and material. Scripted curriculum started out being used heavily by special educators teaching children with reading difficulties (Camp & Aldridge, 2007). Therefore, utilizing a heavily scripted curriculum will yield very different outcomes of student engagement with a small group of students compared to whole group instruction.

All three participants had concerns about equity, access, and skill acquisition for students with the materials provided through EL. Prior knowledge needed for the content of the materials, irrespective of the skills being taught was also something that all three participants discussed.

All participants shared their experiences and thoughts surrounding planning for EL. One of the benefits of a scripted curriculum is the decrease in planning time. All curriculum components are predetermined and ready to use, so this was not an expected finding. However, all participants reported spending a significant amount of time preparing to deliver instruction through EL.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

District leaders must provide clear insight for principals and educators when adopting a scripted curriculum regarding implementation expectations. Instructors who are expected to teach a new curriculum should have access to all curriculum resources and materials before they are required to teach the content and utilize the materials. Upon completing a thorough review, educators should be allowed to share feedback regarding lessons, delivery of content, and materials. If there is a mismatch between the educators' and district stakeholders' beliefs and thoughts, these should be rectified prior to the curriculum being implemented to alleviate the stress of the issues.

The experience of the people being educated should be considered when such important decisions are being made. Students should be provided the opportunity to share what they are feeling and experiencing while receiving instruction. This would allow the proper modifications and adjustments to be made when necessary.

### **Study Expansion**

This study could be expanded to include a more prominent participant population. It was conducted within two of the largest counties in a southeastern state. Expanding the study could have been implemented to gain more insight into how teachers across the country view this scripted curriculum. The fact that this was a small case study limits the study's findings. Convenience sampling was utilized in this study, so there is a need for more diversity amongst the participants. Participant diversity could include variety among race, background, different states, and different ages. The participants in this study seemed to have similar years of experience. Interviewing teachers at the beginning stage of their careers compared to teachers closer to retirement age could provide more insight into how a teacher's classroom experiences can impact their perspective. There were no special education teachers included in this study, and it would be insightful to learn more about special education teachers' perspectives of EL education.

Additionally, no one expected to complete an entire school year shaped and molded by a worldwide pandemic. It would be insightful to look at how the pandemic impacted teachers' perspectives on delivering EL instruction. This topic could add another layer of understanding on how outside and uncontrollable factors could affect how an educator views the curriculum. Additionally, there should be further exploration of implementation in a small group versus a whole class setting.

## **Lessons Learned**

Throughout this study, I was reminded of the importance of allowing teachers the opportunity to share their experiences from inside the classroom. Educators are working firsthand with students daily and have an in-depth understanding of student needs. Empowering teachers to share that insight has reminded me of how often we learn from one another. As I move throughout my career in education, I would like to always value the perspectives and opinions of those who are working closely with students. Allowing teachers to share firsthand experiences and accounts about the curriculum should provide necessary information for stakeholders to make informed decisions about implementation and ensure all students have a positive learning experience. Additionally, giving teachers a voice and the opportunity to share their experiences can increase teacher buy into the curriculum. With increased buy-in and involvement with the curriculum, that must be positive for all involved.

As an educator, the stories and viewpoints shared by the participants resonated strongly with me. Educators work hands-on with students daily; therefore, they know what students are truly in need of. It is essential to always ensure teachers give students the best opportunity to succeed and grow on their learning journeys. Utilizing educators' craft knowledge allows educators to be a part of the decision-making process on how to best meet the needs of all students.

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