2019-2020 WTU Teacher Leaders’ Program

**Newsflash! Stick to the Script: How Does a Scripted Curriculum Affect Student Achievement in Title I Schools versus Students in non-Title I Schools?**

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**Rationale**

This research serves to examine the effects of the scripted curriculum on student achievement in Title I versus non-Title I schools. A scripted curriculum contains sets of prescribed objectives, student deliverables, assessments and lesson plans with pre-written teacher directions that must be repeated exactly as they are written. Institutions are defined as Title I schools when they receive federal funding because the school’s population exceeds 29% of students who are low- income, English language learners, receive free or reduced lunch and or receive special education services. An analysis of the District of Columbia’s physical landscape shows a concentration of Title I elementary schools east of the Anacostia River clustered with decreased property values and increased crime (Navigating Washington, DC with Metro, 2020). The District of Columbia’s adoption of the scripted curriculum was to remedy the educational inequities that exist within its schools. On the converse, could the scripted curriculum that was intended to remedy inequities be the source of more racial and socioeconomic divisions within public school education (Tatum, 2017)? What about the teachers who are told to stick to this script[ed] curriculum…the same teachers that have a direct impact on student achievement (DuFour, 2015)? The purpose of this study highlights the biases, both implicit and explicit, found in the scripted curriculum coupled with the curriculum’s implementation will highlight its effect on student achievement.

**Literature Review**

Title I and non-Title I schools within the District of Columbia have separate criteria for success that they must meet annually. In the federal government’s effort to give schools equal access to funding, low performing schools must show an increase in student growth and proficiency as measured by a nationally accepted assessment as indicated by the Every Student Succeeds Act (herein referenced as ESSA). The ABC’s of ESEA, ESSA and No Child Left Behind (2020) offers a streamlined view of The Every Student Succeeds Act which is a federal document that exceeds 75 pages. Among explaining the need for states to remain in compliance with federal law so that states can receive federal funding, the document explains the disconnect between the purpose of the law and individual states interpretation of remaining in compliance.

ESSA is the government’s eighth authorization of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (2019). It proves necessary to explore the factors that lead to The Every Student Succeeds Act (2020) The intention of The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was to support President Lyndon B. Johnson in the nation’s war on poverty. Lawmakers made segregation of public facilities (herein referenced as schools) illegal. However, the nation did not provide clear guidance on how to integrate schools. As a result, when individual states applied for continued federal funding, the data regarding student achievement was inflated because the average of all schools were taken. However, the performance of privileged students increased the state’s average on student achievement. Thus, the state’s average largely reflected schools from affluent communities which had higher property values and more funds to allocate toward schools.

The nation’s initiative to focus closely on unprivileged neighborhoods within states led to the inception of No Child Left Behind. The No Child Left Behind mandate called for all students in schools that received federal funding to demonstrate proficiency. The setback with this mandate was it was more punitive in nature because low performing students would need to make more than a year’s growth to reach proficient status. Furthermore, teachers and administrators who served in poor neighborhoods were penalized because of their students’ non proficient status on assessments (DuFour, 2015).

ESSA advocates for a more equitable approach in data reporting. This 8th revision targeted districts and schools to be accountable in their reporting and their response to remedy their district’s issues in student achievement. Schools who received federal funding had to demonstrate proficiency on high stakes assessments and show student growth. How schools reported student growth had to be reported by subgroups such as special education, gender, English as a second language, homeless and students on free and reduced lunch. Furthermore, the districts who allocate funds to schools must provide a plan to address the schools who are in the lowest percentile regarding student achievement. ESSA contains guidance on financial efforts that must also be taken to support low performing schools, namely Title II funding. The District of Columbia’s expenditure on the scripted curriculum satisfies The District of Columbia’s response to low performing schools (Title I schools) that are concentrated east of the Anacostia River (Navigating Washington, DC with Metro, 2020 and District of Columbia Public Schools, 2018).

According to Deeper Learning Networks (Hernandez, 2019), “schools are organizations that replicate and spread their models under common…philosophies, core values… and pedagogical approaches.” If the District of Columbia (herein referenced as DCPS) allows teachers in affluent neighborhoods to exercise their expertise and skills to meet the needs of their students but mandates teachers in below proficient schools to follow a curriculum that bars teachers from meeting their students educational needs, the district is making an explicit statement about how it feels about students in resource poor communities. Furthermore, the students in Title I schools are being robbed of an educational experience that is readily available to four star and five star schools [STAR is the evaluation system used for Washington, DC schools] (District of Columbia Public Schools, 2018).

**Methodology [Data/Tools/Process]**

This research utilized the sample population method. It targeted teachers within the District of Columbia. Of that population, the research focused on teachers who have implemented the scripted curriculum adopted by Washington, DC. The group of teachers within Washington DC who have ever implemented the scripted curriculum the district adopted became the sample population. Of the sample population, the study sample are the teachers from east of the Anacostia River and those who are not East of the Anacostia River.

This qualitative research contains mixed methods. The teachers responded to the questionnaire anonymously using the Likert scale [survey tool ranging from agree to strongly disagree]. The fourteen questions generated were categorized as follows: instructional content, opportunities for differentiation, student engagement and teacher attitudes toward curriculum. The previously mentioned categories all impact teacher facilitation of the scripted curriculum which is inextricably tied to student achievement.

**Data Analysis**

An aggregated look at the data supports that the study sample concludes that the scripted curriculum DCPS implements does not retain student engagement. Because 72% of the same declared that the curriculum does not keep their students engaged, more autonomy on behalf of the teacher is needed to make the curriculum accessible. The sample further reported that 68% of teachers do not conclude that the scripted curriculum includes support to help students approaching grade level and 72% of teachers explained that the scripted curriculum negates the needs of “unique learners” within their classrooms. More than 50% of the teachers surveyed have 10 or more years of teaching experience; however, more than 67% of them agree that the scripted curriculum does not take their instructional expertise into account. The data demonstrates that 58% of the teachers surveyed are not allowed to create assessments using the knowledge they have regarding student abilities, interests and learning styles to track student learning.

**Policy Recommendations**

The scripted curriculum that DCPS adopted satisfies all of the explicit requirements the district needs to remain in compliance with federal law. However, the spirit of ESSA was intended to address the inequities that exist within districts that are ignored, unreported and unmentioned.

As indicated by this study DCPS should shift its focus to literacy to provide more data about the effectiveness of the scripted curriculum. When the district shifts its instructional focus to literacy, data from students in Title I schools can show how student learning experiences and student achievement improve when teachers are allowed to use their knowledge and skill sets to meet their students needs. More teacher autonomy is needed. Further research is needed in order to ascertain how a scripted curriculum affects student achievement in Title I schools versus students in non-Title I schools?A larger sample is needed.

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