Teaching across the lines: adapting scripted programmes with culturally relevant/responsive teaching

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The American legislation of No Child Left Behind resulted in a boom in scripted, prepackaged curricula for improving student outcomes. At the same time, greater attention to the needs of diverse populations also took prominence, resulting in a new area of study, culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy. The current view is that scripted curriculum and culturally responsive teaching are mutually exclusive in educating culturally and linguistically diverse students. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that when given the opportunity to make adjustments to scripted curriculum to incorporate culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy, these approaches to education can be combined into one that is more effective than the implementation of either model. This study has implications for curriculum designers and teachers who serve high populations of culturally diverse students.

Keywords: Culturally Relevant Teaching; Scripted Models; CREDE

Introduction

During the period of American legislation known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), schools weighed their options on how to increase the academic achievement of their students. This policy resulted in commercially developed scripted programmes gaining prominence as principals searched for ways to increase teachers’ use of scientifically based teaching strategies. For many administrators, these scripted programmes are attractive because they come ‘prepackaged’ with curriculum and professional development for teachers (Garan 2002). They also promote their ability to meet the needs of all children in effective and convincing ways. As a result, scripted programmes are popular, especially in schools that serve high levels of culturally and linguistically diverse students and those interested in raising test scores (Borman et al. 2002).

At the same time that scripted programmes have boomed, a shift in the educational climate has given greater attention to the needs of diverse

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populations. Advocates of culturally responsive teaching assert that the education of children, particularly those who are culturally diverse, cannot be standardised. Rather, instruction needs to be delivered in ways that bring personal meaning and cultural relevance to students. Because of their rigidity in implementation, scripted programmes are viewed as a barrier to equity and excellence in education, particularly for teachers dedicated to social justice (Cochran-Smith, Davis, and Fries 2004; Wei 2002).

These conflicting approaches have caught teachers in a cross-current that prods them in different and sometimes contrary directions (Sleeter and Cornbleth 2011). On the one hand, teachers must navigate diversity and, on the other, they must implement curriculum without modification to students’ needs. Balancing these two models is tenuous and many teachers who find themselves in this position must make difficult decisions between creating meaningful activities and preserving their own job security (Darling-Hammond and Wise 1985; McNeil 2000).

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that although scripted programmes and culturally responsive teaching are viewed as mutually exclusive in the education of diverse students, they can be combined into one approach that is more effective than the implementation of either model. When given the opportunity to make adjustments, teachers are successful at drawing out the strengths from both models to meet the cultural, linguistic, and academic needs of their students. This article aims to provide a critical analysis of how teachers successfully walked this line through a multiple case study.

**Comprehensive school reform models**

Although scripted programmes existed long before 2002, their rise in American classrooms can be traced back to the passing of NCLB legislation (Milosovic 2007). A major impetus for their adoption was the publishing of the National Reading Panel Report, which outlined the major components and processes involved in teaching reading. The content of this report defined what strategies lead to successful reading and provided suggestions for quick fixes to the problem of students’ low reading scores. Many researchers have widely criticised this report, arguing that the research included in the study focused too narrowly on discrete skills, only considering reading processes such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Cummins 2007; Duncan-Owens 2009; Yatvin, Weaver, and Garan 2003). They criticise the panel members for assuming that a discrete skills approach is the right way to teach reading, without comparing it to an integrated, more comprehensive approach. Regardless of these criticisms, curriculum designers secured scripted programmes in American schools by capitalising on this report.
Research suggests that the adoption process of scripted programmes is complicated and riddled with potential pitfalls. Many administrators do not understand that models behave differently depending on the context in which they are implemented. Datnow and Stringfield (2000) found that administrators make hasty decisions about which programme to purchase. They overlook the nuanced differences between models, trusting that whatever programme is chosen will be successful (Datnow 1999). In such cases, administrators lack understanding of how these programmes work and the subtle differences emphasised in their design. In addition, many literacy programmes are advertised as being aligned with the Reading First guidelines that stem from the National Reading Panel Report (Duncan-Owens 2007). As mentioned earlier, these guidelines have been criticised for being limited in scope because they focused too narrowly on the development of discrete skills (Yatvin, Weaver, and Garan 2003).

Adopting and implementing scripted programmes may bring several benefits to schools as a whole, but generally takes a toll on educators. The immediate benefit is that they solve the problem associated with new and inexperienced teachers who are unsure of how to begin the teaching process. They are designed to provide support structures to direct teacher behaviour and in this way are beneficial (Duncan-Owens 2009). The criticism, however, is that these programmes marginalise teachers by not allowing them to make decisions about how to organise lessons and interact with students (Garan 2004). Teachers are reduced to following a scripted lesson without modification and are in some cases reprimanded for not adhering to the pacing schedule (Delpit 2003). According to design teams, a model’s success depends on how well it is replicated in the new location, thus supporting strict adherence (Stebbins et al. 1977).

Another benefit is they provide consistency across classrooms and grade levels, making it easier for teachers to plan their lessons and for supervisors to monitor teachers’ practice. However, these programmes effectively de-skil and de-professionalise teachers, reducing them to middle managers (Rice 2004). Strict implementation has contributed to educators feeling constrained by what to teach, the amount of time allocated to individual lessons, and how students should be assessed. Consequently, teachers modify their instruction by devoting an inordinate amount of time to test-taking preparation and teaching only content that will be covered on the test (Crocco and Costigan 2007).

The America’s Choice model is an example of the scripted literacy programme commonly adopted in schools serving high levels of culturally diverse students. Although considered a scripted programme, some view America’s Choice as less prescriptive compared to others on the market (Supovitz, Taylor, and May 2002). The next section details the varying components of the America’s Choice model.
America’s Choice has been popular in schools whose teachers serve students of high poverty and cultural diversity. Over the last 10 years, the programme has made a concerted effort to reach schools with low income and minority youth (Corcoran et al. 2000). It is estimated that by 2004, the America’s Choice model was implemented in over 500 schools across the nation (Supovitz and May 2004). The centrepiece of this model is an extended daily literacy block that develops the habits of good readers and writers by clearly defining literacy behaviours that will lead to success (Corcoran et al. 2000). The literacy workshops are organised around a sequence of activities that focus on work periods known as Reader’s and Writer’s workshop (Supovitz, Poglinco, and Bach 2002). Ideally, schools have structured the day so that students have one hour to focus on reading and one hour for writing. Rituals and routines guide student behaviour, as well as provide a means for weaving activities together.

Both Reader’s and Writer’s workshops follow a basic structure of a short mini-lesson followed by extensive independent work time where students practise the presented lesson (Supovitz, Poglinco, and Bach 2002). In Readers’ workshop, the students engage in a whole-class mini-lesson for 15–20 minutes where the teacher covers phonics-based skills, comprehension, decoding word analysis, or other procedures. This time is typically followed by independent reading time or book talk for about 45 minutes. The lesson ends with a short closure where students are given the opportunity to share what they read with the rest of the class. The Writer’s workshop is organised in a similar way with 7–10-minute mini-lessons grouped into categories: procedural, craft, and skills (Supovitz, Poglinco, and Bach 2002). Like Readers’ workshop, these lessons end with a closing structure that reflects back to the mini-lesson.

Analysis of teachers’ implementation of America’s Choice reveals that not all teachers implement the programme to the same degree and that many take liberties in implementation. Although teachers receive the message that they must maintain fidelity to the programme, teachers continue to adapt models of education to meet their needs (Datnow et al. 2003). In fact, in an analysis of the America’s Choice programme, Supovits, Poglinco, and Bach (2002) found that at the highest level, teachers infuse their own talents and understanding of the learning process into the structure of America’s Choice. In such cases, teachers may capitalise on the independent work period to meet with an individual student or create a mini-lesson that targets students’ needs. However, these kinds of adjustments are not sanctioned.

This finding in teacher adaptation suggests that even though design teams do not recommend that teachers make changes to their scripted programmes, there may be reason to do so. Research supports the idea that no programme is seen as effective if teachers do not make adjustments to the
script (Datnow 2000). The issue, however, is that there are very few resources available to teachers that guide them in the decision-making process. What little literature exists on this subject are personal accounts and teacher narratives of educators struggling to find a balance between scripted models and meeting the needs of students (e.g. Baker and Digiovanni 2005; Sleeter and Cornbleth 2011). While these 'how-to' descriptions provide some insight into the tension teachers face, what we need are more systematic and critical analyses of how teachers bridged these models. The next section outlines the rise of culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy, followed by a description of the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE) model, the model of culturally responsive education teachers used in this study.

Culturally relevant/responsive teaching

The rise of culturally relevant/responsive education can be traced to the 1970s and 1980s when schools across the United States were undergoing desegregation (Sleeter 2010). At this time, educators and school districts were looking for approaches to work more productively with diverse student populations and began experimenting with different ideas for how best to approach integrated classrooms. Although the term culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy was not yet invented, several programmes were using ideas that later became known as such. These programmes included: the Kamehameha Early Education Program for Native Hawaiians (Tharp 1982), cultural modelling in African American classrooms (Lee 2007, 2008), and community schools for Navajo students in Rough Rock and Rock Point (Watahomingie and McCarty 1994).

By the 1990s, this movement had grown to a critical mass and many researchers began exploring the intersection of language, literacy, and culture within various ethnic groups such as African American, Latina/o, Native American, and Pacific Islanders (Ball 1995; Lee 1995; McCarty and Zepeda 1995; Moll and Gonzalez 1994; Valdez 1996). Paris and Ball (2009) coined this period the golden age because it marked a period when pedagogical and curricular innovations emerged in the education of diverse students.

Ladson-Billings (1995) is credited with the formulation of culturally relevant pedagogy, while others are credited with culturally responsive pedagogy (Cazden and Leggett 1976, 1981; Gay 2000). While there are subtle differences between these models, one point of agreement seems to be making use of students' funds of knowledge in the teaching and learning process (e.g. Au and Kawakami 1994; Banks et al. 2005; Gay 2000; Ladson-Billings 1995; Tharp 1989). The idea for using funds of knowledge originates from the work of Moll and Gonzalez (1994) who began exploring resource pedagogies in diverse communities. Using students' funds of
knowledge in the teaching and learning process helped teachers move away from deficit models of education, in which students were seen as lacking tools, resources, and knowledge that would allow them to be successful in formal education. The funds of knowledge approach views children as capable, knowledgeable, and full of life experience to be used in the classroom. Gay (2000, 29) describes using funds of knowledge in teaching as building ‘bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities’. It includes teaching in ways that acknowledge students’ cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and frames of reference gleaned from students’ home and community.

Other commonalities between these models include the incorporation of activities that reinforce co-operation between students. Teachers seek to create experiences where students are not in competition with each other, but rather develop and learn together much like a family (Arce 2004; Brown 2003; Weinstein, Curran, and Tomlinson 2003). This requires teachers to be responsive to students, reacting to what they say and do and then using what is offered to forward a teaching agenda (Tharp and Gallimore 1988). Teachers must assume the role of a cultural broker, mediating the gap between students’ everyday lives and the world of school by tying together students’ comments (Gay 2000; Sleeter 2010; Sleeter and Cornbleth 2011). Unlike teachers’ role in scripted programmes, teaching is thus seen as a highly creative act because it requires improvisation and consideration of what is being offered in the moment (Sawyer 2004).

Although culturally relevant/responsive models differ in subtle ways, Sleeter (2010) argues that this approach has been marginalised in favour of neoliberal educational reforms that treat race, culture, and the educational context as if they do not exist. These programmes are deliberately designed to be context-blind and treat all students in the same way, regardless of their background. Part of the issue, according to Sleeter, is that even though there is quite a bit of research on this way of teaching, very few studies systematically examine its effect on student achievement. Typically, research in this area tends to focus on a small set of case studies that connect culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy with student engagement. The limited research in this area may be one of the reasons that culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy remains marginalised as an approach to teaching diverse students.

The CREDE model
Researchers at CREDE developed one of the few models that examined the positive connection between culturally responsive teaching and student achievement (Doherty and Hilberg 2007; Hilberg, Tharp, and DeGeest 2000; Saunders and Goldenberg 1999). The model has been in existence from the early 1990s. It originated from the work at Kamehameha Early
Education Project (KEEP), one of the model programmes often cited as a precursor to culturally responsive pedagogy.

The CREDE model consists of both an implementation structure and set of pedagogical strategies using the work of Vygotsky (1978) as a guide. The model is designed to be flexible so it can be implemented into different classroom contexts and reflect the cultural patterns and values reflected in the community (Tharp and Dalton 2007). Unlike many other models, there are no specified teaching steps. Rather, teachers are expected to figure out how to use the CREDE Standards in ways that are effective for their specific context. The seven CREDE Standards are: (1) Joint Productive Activity, teacher and student collaboration; (2) Language and Literacy Development, language development across the curriculum; (3) Contextualization, connecting to prior knowledge; (4) Complex Thinking, developing complex thought; (5) Instructional Conversation, teaching through dialogue; (6) Modeling, observational learning; (7) Student Directed Activity, student decision making. These CREDE Standards serve as a guideline for teachers to use as they design and enact their lessons.

Research question

In this study, teachers attempted to implement the CREDE model into classrooms where the scripted programme America’s Choice was already fully implemented. This investigation aims to discover how teachers can implement both scripted programmes and culturally relevant/responsive pedagogy into one learning context. The following research question guided this study: ‘How did the America’s Choice teachers, participating in the CREDE professional development programme, attempt to integrate the CREDE model into their America’s Choice instruction?’

Methods

Context of the study

This study examined how seven teachers serving high levels of culturally and linguistically diverse students in Hawai‘i attempted to incorporate the CREDE model into the America’s Choice programme. Scripted programmes have been a popular answer to Hawai‘i’s challenge of raising students’ achievement scores and America’s Choice was one of the first programmes adopted by the state (Hess and Squire 2009). At the same time, across the state there is widespread support for cultural revitalisation and an urge for teachers to address the needs of their culturally and linguistically diverse students. For teachers interested in integrating culture into their classrooms, the CREDE model has been a consistent source of professional development for teachers (Yamauchi 2003, 2005). This study examined the instruction of seven teachers as they implemented both CREDE and the America’s Choice programme into one classroom.
Participants
Participants in this study included seven kindergarten to 5th grade teachers who enrolled in a year-long programme of professional development on the CREDE model while continuing to implement America’s Choice. The professional development programme emphasised the need for teachers to provide responsive assistance in the teaching and learning process. The idea was to teach educators how to move students from other assistance to self-assistance, an idea used in teaching within students’ zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978).

As part of their professional development, teachers enrolled in six credits of graduate-level course work at the University. The course required teachers to submit lesson plans, teaching reflections, and reflections on their videotaped lessons. Teachers were also expected to participate in four workshops on the CREDE model and coaching sessions. The teachers in this study participated in CREDE professional development at different times over the course of four years (2008–2012).

The average length of time teachers implemented the America’s Choice programme was four years with a range from two to eight years. As mentioned earlier, America’s Choice is a literacy programme, however, participants were allowed to choose between their literacy and mathematics block to implement the CREDE model. Implementing the rituals and routines of mathematics into the America’s Choice programme mathematics is a common practice among America’s Choice schools (May and Supovitz 2013). With the exception of one participant, all the participants were female, Caucasian, and had relocated to Hawai‘i from the continental United States. Only one teacher identified herself as Filipina and was raised in the Hawaiian Islands. All the classrooms were highly diverse in culture. See Table 1 for demographic data on teachers, students, and their schools.

Data sources
Data were collected over a four-year period (2008–2012) as cohorts of teachers enrolled in the CREDE professional development programme. Data sources were collected as part of the assignments required for participation in the CREDE professional development. These sources included: (1) teachers’ lesson plans, (2) teachers’ reflections on their practice, and (3) coaches’ observational notes.

Teachers’ lesson plans
As part of the coaching cycle, teachers were required to submit lesson plans prior to their coaches’ observation. Five lessons were collected per teacher for a total of 35. These lesson plans included the teachers’ goals, activity descriptions, and plans for assessment. They were used to understand how
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year participated</th>
<th>Grade level taught</th>
<th>Subject area</th>
<th>Number of years teaching</th>
<th>Number of years with America's Choice</th>
<th>Top three ethnic groups represented in school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>2008–2009</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Language Arts/ Mathematics</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50.5% Part-Hawaiian 16.4% Hawaiian 7% Filipino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carly</td>
<td>2009–2010</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55.5% Part-Hawaiian 14.1% Hawaiian 6.2% Filipino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>2009–2010</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55.5% Part-Hawaiian 14.1% Hawaiian 6.2% Filipino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>2009–2010</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>55.5% Part-Hawaiian 14.1% Hawaiian 6.2% Filipino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>2010–2011</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>70.1% Native Hawaiian 6.9% Samoan 5.1% Filipino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>2011–2012</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>Language Arts/ Mathematics</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>62.3% Filipino 18.3% Native Hawaiian 8.8% Micronesian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melia</td>
<td>2011–2012</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18.3% Native Hawaiian 8.8% Micronesian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
models were incorporated into the teachers' instruction. When aspects of the model were incorporated into the teachers' instruction, Whelan et al. (2009) found that teachers perceived a reduction in stress (Committee on the Education of Teachers, 2008). This study took a multiple-case study approach (Von 2009) as teachers were interviewed and observed in their classrooms. The model was tested in two classrooms, each with 15 students. During the observations, coaches kept a running record of everything that happened.

The CRED model over time

The CRED model showed the evolution of teachers' understanding and use of professional development programs, and how teachers implemented them in their classrooms. Teachers interviewed indicated that the CRED model was effective in improving teachers' understanding and implementation of the model.
The basis for judging whether a programmatic component should have been included stemmed from relevant literature including implementation manuals and previous studies on these models. This way of analysing the data is known as pattern matching (Yin 2009) and differs from pattern recognition in that a pattern is precisely described before the matching process begins. In this study, I focused on earlier work from teachers’ implementation of relevant/responsive teaching (Gay 2000; Ladson-Billings 1995), the implementation of the America’s Choice scripted programmes (e.g. Supovitz and May 2004; Supovitz, Taylor, and May 2002; Supovitz, Poglinco, and Bach 2002), and the CREDE model (Dalton 2008; Tharp et al. 2000). Once these data were analysed, coding from teachers’ reflections was used to provide possible explanation and extension for the findings. Once each teachers’ implementation was described, cross-case analysis (Yin 2009) was conducted to examine the similarities and differences between classrooms.

Results

Analysis of the data resulted in three major themes as teachers made adjustments to the America’s Choice programme to include the CREDE model. First, the teachers combined the instructional frameworks; replaced the America’s Choice Work Time tasks with structures and activity designs provided by the CREDE model; and added the CREDE Standard of Contextualization and Student Directed Activities to ensure the content was relevant and meaningful to students.

Combining frameworks

The America’s Choice Opening procedure remained fairly intact as teachers combined the two models. Many teachers felt the models were similar and they did not feel the need to change this part of their instruction. For example, Mary explained,

I used phase one [from the CREDE model] because I felt that the students were fresh from summer vacation, and they were new to the [CREDE] programme. The students are used to the workshop model of America’s Choice, [where] the opening is similar to the [CREDE] briefing.

However, the delivery shifted from a whole-class modelled lesson to a brief preview of the day’s activities. In doing so, the teachers reduced the Opening from the typical 20 minutes to less than 10 minutes. Becky reported that in making this adjustment, she was able to capture her students’ attention in ways that were not possible with the America’s Choice programme:
Although I do have some behaviour problems, implementing the CREDE model cut down tremendously on the little things that used to drive me crazy as a teacher—the kid that couldn’t sit still and listen to a 20-minute opening, or the kid that had to keep fidgeting on the carpet. I think they give me more respect when I am doing direct instruction now because they know it is only going to last a short time. It reminds me of the teacher on the old Snoopy cartoons. They really try to focus on my blah, blah, blah teacher talk, because they know they are going to get to move to these centres in a short time.

Other teachers reported similar changes once they stopped requiring students to observe the modelled lesson required by America’s Choice. Beth described her students as being quickly ‘engaged and ready to begin their activities’.

In addition six of the seven teachers replaced America’s Choice rules with CREDE’s student-generated values to frame the day’s activities. These values contrasted sharply with the rules teachers used in the America’s Choice programme. For example, Anna’s values represent many of those found in the other classrooms: ‘We value: working together, helping each other, doing quality work, and respecting our friends.’ Only one teacher, Jean, did not generate values with her students, but continued to emphasise rules suggested by America’s Choice. Jean’s rules included such things as ‘Stay in your bubble. Read the entire time. Stay in your seat. Don’t bother your neighbour. Work in your reader’s notebook. And, work on your reading goal.’ In Jean’s classroom, students were guided to work towards their own progress, independent of each other.

Six of the seven teachers also modified the Closing procedure from the typical America’s Choice format where students are encouraged to present their work at the end of a lesson. In the CREDE model’s debriefing, the focus is not on individual achievement, but the success of the group. The majority of teachers expressed that singling out students and sharing individual work were not appropriate practices in the Hawaiian culture. Further, they wanted to move away from aspects of the America’s Choice programme that emphasised individual accomplishment over group dynamics. For example, in Mary’s first lesson, she asked her students to share their strategies with the rest of the class, ending the activity in this way, ‘Group 2 came up with a guide for getting better at reading. The group is going to share what they came up with.’

Adjustments such as these had a positive effect on the teachers and the class environment as a whole. Before modifying her Closing, one teacher described this part of the lesson as when her students became ‘glassy-eyed’, waiting for the script to end. However, after adjusting the Closing so students had an opportunity to discuss how they worked together, teachers reported that it was easier to see what other classroom adjustments were needed. As Melia explained, ‘The debriefing [has] become an important part of rotations for me because inevitably things come up. What really seemed
to be powerful was when I could make adjustments to the rotations based on feedback from the children.’ Beth described how changing the Closing influenced her students:

In previous years, I always felt that having discussions about behaviour and getting students’ feedback on how the class is operating took away time that we didn’t have … [However, in adjusting the Closing] some amazing things have happened as a result. First, the overall tone of respect in the classroom is dramatically higher. Also, this is the first year I have noticed students independently managing their own and each other’s behaviour.

**Changing the setting: replacing America’s Choice Work Time activities**

In addition to combining aspects of the two models, teachers replaced components of America’s Choice with those from the CREDE model. Most dramatically, teachers began using multiple simultaneous activity centres. In making these changes, they no longer provided whole-group instruction for the main lesson, but rather sat with one group for an extended period of time.

**Multiple simultaneous activity centres**

All seven teachers transformed the America’s Choice curriculum from being implemented as single, sequential activities, to multiple simultaneous activities where students rotated to a new activity every 15–20 minutes. However, by replacing the assignment of these activities with multiple activities where groups of students worked on one activity before rotating to another, teachers reduced the amount of time students needed to concentrate on a single task. This change in setting in turn increased student engagement and on-task behaviour. Teachers reported this shift made the classroom fresh and dynamic and changed ‘the entire atmosphere of the classroom’. Becky felt that work time arranged in this way was ‘so much more productive … as opposed to the workshop model’.

Beth saw an immediate difference in her students. She explained,

I’ve already seen a dramatic increase in participation when I have my students work with partners. Last week I had a math lesson in which half the students were doing one activity with partners while the other half was doing a different activity … The amount of learning and conversations going on seemed much higher than when I have students work individually.

Other teachers expressed similar results, reporting that students were more engaged and demonstrated greater on-task behaviour as a result of replacing America’s Choice with CREDE’s activity centres. Even Jean, the teacher who seemed to adhere most to the America’s Choice model, noted a
positive shift. In her third lesson reflection, she included an important insight into how collaboration influenced her students’ work:

[I] have seen improvement in students’ thinking through the discussion of the answers and explaining their answers. The students showed a high level of critical thinking through that debate, which was much more important for me than their test-taking ability.

To assist students in learning to collaborate, Beth realised she could model high-level interactions in her small groups and began to see this setting as ‘an opportunity for teachers to model ... ways to assist one another’. Jean also attempted to be more explicit in this regard. She explained that if she could teach her students to collaborate and engage in peer assistance, ‘they will solidify their own knowledge while being a resource for other students’.

Teacher centre
In an attempt to ensure they were responsive to students, teachers also shifted their role in the classroom. No longer did they float from group to group, but instead worked intensely with one group delivering the main lesson, while the other students collaborated on joint tasks. In making this change in the classroom setting, six of the seven teachers expressed they were better able to assist and assess student learning.

Becky’s comment illustrates the teachers’ frustration in using the America’s Choice model in teaching new content, ‘I did America’s Choice the way it is supposed to be, and it was a disaster. I could not meet with all the students at their tables.’ She elaborated on why the America’s Choice format did not work and why implementing a teacher centre did:

I like to think that I am pretty mobile, but there is no way a teacher can bounce around and have a successful Instructional Conversation with each group in a 30-minute work time. I never even made it to one group so I had no idea if they understood the task. They could have been completely lost and I would have never known it because they were quiet and looked to be on task. I cannot see how a teacher can effectively assess the students in this situation. It worries me to think about the quiet students in these situations, the students who are not asking for my help, or causing trouble, could easily fall through the cracks. It was during the taping of this lesson that I realised that the workshop model ... was not a successful way to meet my students’ needs.

The shift from whole- to small-group instruction marked a major change for teachers, although for some it required creativity and use of other adults in the classroom. Jean implemented Reader’s workshop by employing her assistant to do the required one-on-one assistance from the America’s
The other five teachers made connections using students’ experiences from school, however, these teachers seemed frustrated with the limitations of America’s Choice. They expressed that the curriculum limited the kind of Contextualization available. Mary felt America’s Choice was too focused on raising test scores and did not provide enough time to make personal connections in the classroom. Other teachers, such as Melia, reported not being trained on how to make certain aspects of the curriculum relevant to students’ lives and found it easier to make connections to the content within the classroom. Some teachers, such as Anna, felt it was difficult to contextualise because she did not have enough time, particularly if she maintained strict fidelity to the number of activities prescribed in the America’s Choice curriculum; and Becky found it difficult to connect to students’ lives within different content areas.

Mary was the most vocal about this difficulty and expressed her belief that the programme deliberately emphasised decontextualised learning so that it could be implemented in any school regardless of the context. She explained that she has been ‘brainwashed [by the] America’s Choice [model] which pushes for teachers to promote academic learning, to the detriment of making learning personally or culturally meaningful’. Although she wanted to include more of Contextualization in the classroom, she found it difficult.

Regardless of their struggle to find opportunities within the curriculum, most of the teachers found contextualisation valuable. Becky expressed,

I feel ashamed to admit that I never put so much thought into contextualisation before taking these courses. I knew it was important, but when I started emphasising the need for it in all lessons, it became apparent how big of a role it plays in student success.

Adding Student Directed Activity

Five of the seven teachers added the CREDE Standard of Student Direct Activity in which students are given opportunities to make decisions regarding their learning. This CREDE Standard emphasises the need for students to have opportunities to take ownership over their classroom environment, including how and what they learn. This modification was not implemented uniformly across teachers. Only two of the mathematics teachers found this adjustment easily accomplished. Melia gave her students options at the different activity centres where students could choose the activity that best met their need for practice. Becky had a routine for garnering students’ ideas and incorporated it into her Closing sessions. She explained that once a week she asked her students to write down an idea for a mathematics centre and then incorporated these ideas into collaborative activities, which increased student achievement:
Choice model while she worked in small groups. She explained, ‘I am going to tweak the Reader's workshop to teach in Instructional Conversation groups. The majority of the class will independently read while Morgan does one-on-one instruction and I do small-group [instruction].’

Even Jean discovered that by moving instruction from the Opening, where America’s Choice emphasises the day’s instruction, to the teacher centre, she was able to see a difference in her students’ engagement. She noted the increased opportunities to assess students’ knowledge in this modification.

The modelling taking place in the Instructional Conversation group rather than whole class was really helpful. Students were much more engaged, and I was able to question all the students … allowing for a much more complete check for understanding than could have been accomplished in whole group.

For all teachers, the importance of moving instruction to the teacher centre proved to be necessary in the modification of the America’s Choice programme because it allowed teachers to assist and assess student learning successfully.

Adding elements of the CREDE model

The teachers also added in two CREDE Standards, Contextualization and Student Directed Activities, as they adjusted the America’s Choice model. These elements were used as a way to further promote student engagement and learning.

Contextualization

All seven teachers added the CREDE Standard of Contextualization to their instruction. The Contextualization strategy is a pedagogical tool that ensures the topic is relevant and meaningful by drawing from topics that are familiar from home, community, and school. The idea is that if teachers make these connections, students develop a deeper understanding of the content.

Two teachers chose to contextualise new material using students’ home lives. For example, one of Beth’s lessons required students to talk to their families and write a sequence of instructions for accomplishing a task. Beth described an incident in her class where students were asked to use knowledge from their home lives in the assignment:

When he shared his finished piece, the other students were captivated. Other students had experiences with boar hunting too and could relate to the student. Allowing students to choose their topics that connect to their lives outside of school made for a rich and fruitful writing experience. The students were more motivated and produced higher-quality products than if I had assigned topics to them.
I am finding that when the students come up with an idea, the whole class has buy in and it is really working. For the most part, their ideas are really good. I was embarrassed that it took a third grader to suggest that we write the division inverse equations for the multiplication equation you get by choosing two cards.

Becky commented on how valuable implementing Student Directed Activities were for including her students in the curriculum planning. The value of giving students a role not only benefited the students’ engagement, but also her as the teacher. Not only did this save her time in planning for new activities, but increased students’ ownership over their learning.

Discussion

According to Paris (2012), the dominant educational policies and practices in the United States have the explicit goal of creating a mono-cultural and monolingual society. This practice sits in contrast to education that embraces students’ culture and seeks to perpetuate and sustain cultural pluralism. Under NCLB legislation, scripted programmes helped to facilitate the development of a monolingual/multi-cultural society by standardising teacher action and interaction with students. This standardisation process has made it difficult for teachers to connect with the needs of their students and make curricular content relevant. At present, scripted programmes sit in contrast to culturally relevant/responsive education with little common ground between the approaches.

However, this study demonstrates that when given the opportunity to make adjustments to commercially developed programmes, teachers are able to work within their boundaries in ways that support teaching diverse students. If curriculum designers intentionally designed scripted programmes in ways that allow them to be adjusted to meet local needs, these programmes might serve a dual purpose: better serve diverse students and help to re-professionalise the teaching profession that scripted programmes helped to de-professionalise.

According to Remillard (2000), the current trend in curriculum design is to speak through teachers by writing explicit scripts in ways that guide teachers’ actions and communications with students. Teachers’ knowledge and experience is forced to the background in favour of highlighting research-based content and how best to implement skills in a scope and sequence. Although this is the current trend, curriculum designed to highlight academic content is seen as pedagogically problematic, even for curriculum designers, because it does not support teachers’ understanding of how to make adjustments to the delivery of instruction (Remillard and Reinke 2012). Consequently, curriculum designers should consider using curriculum as a way to speak to teachers by making lessons educative and assisting teachers’ understanding of where and when instruction should be adjusted.
For example, curriculum designers could point out opportunities for \textit{when} and \textit{how} teachers might connect lessons to students’ experiences, either in an integrated fashion or through incidental connections. Curriculum designers might also provide options and directions for how teachers could teach using collaborative formats or partner work. By writing curriculum as if the teacher is a collaborator in the teaching and learning process and not just a conduit for delivering content, teachers learn how to adjust the curriculum to meet the specific needs of their students.

The results of this study expand Remillard’s (2000) work on the direction for the re-design of scripted curriculum, pointing to the need for greater attention on the \textit{activity settings} that foster collaboration and contextualisation in the classroom. \textit{Activity settings} is a term coined by Tharp and Gallimore (1988), which describes teaching and learning in terms of the who, what, when, where, and why of classroom activities. When teachers were given the opportunity to make adjustments to their scripted programme, they shifted \textit{how} they taught, but they left \textit{what} they taught fairly intact. In other words, teachers maintained fidelity to the content provided by the scripted programme, but adjusted the activity design of America’s Choice in ways that favoured greater teacher–student interaction, peer-collaboration, and contextualised activities supported by the CREDE model. The implication is that curriculum designers need to re-consider their narrow focus on academic content to incorporate more effective \textit{activity settings} that allow for varied pedagogical methods.

This work also has implications for the re-professionalisation of teachers’ work. The emergence of scripted curricula that boomed under the United States’s NCLB legislation effectively stripped teachers of their professional expertise, reducing them to actors on a stage reading a script (Sawyer 2004); a role that many critics argue nearly anyone could fulfil. Although current legislation in the United States provides relief from the mandates of NCLB that brought about the emergence of scripted programmes, the recently adopted Common Core State Standards perpetuate the standardised approach to teaching. Porter et al. (2011) argue that the benefits of the Common Core curriculum are precisely the same benefits cited in using scripted programmes under NCLB legislation (Duncan-Owens 2009). Therefore, the results of this current study are relevant to all educational contexts as the nation moves towards the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, currently under way in 46 states.

However, if teachers were not just allowed, but encouraged to adjust standardised curricular models to meet their students’ needs, we may provide a direct means for recasting teachers as highly skilled professionals with acute decision-making and problem-solving ability (Meidl and Meidle 2001). In truth, curriculum designers are limited and can only \textit{suggest} modifications for consideration. Curriculum designers cannot be expected to map out all the possible scenarios teachers may experience in the classroom. In
fact, by the very definition of culturally relevant/responsive education, teaching should be developed for specific cultural groups and not standardised to fit every scenario (Ladson-Billings 1995; Tharp and Dalton 2007). Therefore, we should encourage educators to make changes for every group of students entering the classroom, not just diverse populations. By tailoring instructional content and delivery to the specific needs of varying groups, the very definition of what it means to be an effective teacher in the United States is likely to shift.

Finally, the extent to which teachers are encouraged to make adjustments may impact the extent to which culturally responsive teaching is implemented. For example, Jean appeared to prefer the structures and pedagogical tools offered by America’s Choice even though she recognised the benefits she gained by making adjustments. Her struggle may have stemmed from the fact that she was the America’s Choice coach at her school and therefore found it difficult to adjust her instruction too far away from the America’s Choice model. Perhaps because of her position as the America’s Choice coach, she was conflicted in her role as a teacher of diverse students and a model for other teachers at her school. However, if she was encouraged to adapt the scripted model to her specific educational context, she may have implemented more aspects of the CREDE model.

In conclusion, while scripted programmes and culturally relevant/responsive teaching have often been thought of as mutually exclusive, this study demonstrates that when given the opportunity to modify programmes, teachers are able to adjust instruction in ways that bring greater meaning and opportunity to culturally and linguistically diverse students. In this era of standardised teaching, curricular designers need better guidance for what teachers need to serve diverse students effectively and teachers need to be encouraged to adjust scripted models in ways that make sense to their specific population. Making such adjustments in the design and delivery of scripted programmes holds great promise in serving our changing populations’ needs.

References


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