A Democratic Critique of Scripted Curriculum

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Abstract: Despite the rising popularity of scripted curricula in United States public and charter schools, there has been little to no research that explicitly addresses how this phenomenon influences the democratic aims of our educational system. Using the six democratic values that Meira Levinson (2012) developed/employed to evaluate the movement toward standards, assessment and accountability, the authors examine both the potentials and real-world impacts of scripted curriculum. Although arguments in favor of scripted curriculum suggest that its usage increases the democratic promise of education by rendering instruction more equitable and efficient, the authors suggest that patterns of usage and outcomes are in fact at odds with such values. Furthermore, the authors argue that the pre-structured and highly controlling character of scripted curriculum is inherently undemocratic because it severely constrains the intellectual participation of both teachers and students in the classroom. The authors conclude that greater teacher autonomy and curricular flexibility are necessary elements in the education of future citizens in a democratic society.

Keywords: Scripted Curriculum; Democratic Education; Professional Autonomy; Teacher Role; Standardization

The task of democracy is forever that of creation of a freer and more

human experience in which all share and to which all contribute.

— John Dewey (1988, p. 230)

Introduction

When we think of our ideal educational environment, few of us would summon up

images of a young teacher reading from a text that prescribes and delimits the extent of her

interaction with students. Notwithstanding our aversion to such an image, it is increasingly the

norm in the United States that teachers are required to use 'scripted curricula,' a term which

refers to a wide variety of curricular materials or pre-packaged lesson plans that explicitly script out exactly what the teacher will say, show, and do—and often even how students are expected to respond—so that the teacher only need read from a manual in order to deliver the lesson. This variety of curriculum can be found particularly in schools serving the most disadvantaged students (Ede, 2006), although more empirical research is needed to understand the extent and demographics of its usage. Although it is not entirely a new phenomenon, 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). Although quite a few scholars within educational studies have conducted work on scripted curriculum, none have considered the implications of this variety of curriculum with regard to the democratic purposes of schooling, an angle that has implications reaching far beyond the local context of usage. This paper opens up this line of inquiry by examining scripted curriculum through a critical democratic lens, operating under the foundational premise that public education in the United States serves to develop students into citizens with the necessary competencies to participate in a democratic form of life. The fundamental question we address is whether scripted curriculum contributes to or detracts from the democratic aims of public education.

In approaching the problem of scripted curriculum, we conceptualize it as a product of an extended and complex movement toward greater traditionalism and standardization within education. Rather than analyzing the democratic viability of these educational, political, and economic trends, for the purposes of this paper we will focus exclusively on the types of interactions that scripted curriculum, in particular, facilitates; that is to say, whether it increases

and encourages democratic relations or undermines the values that our democratic system of education aims to foster and protect.

In the course of our analysis, we provide a brief historical overview of scripted curriculum within the US context before clarifying our understanding of democracy as not simply a political system but also a 'way of life' (Dewey, 1988, p. 226) that enables individuals to consciously participate in the formulation and reproduction of their living conditions (Dewey 1980; Gutmann, 1999). As such, the paper contains a subargument regarding the character of democracy which is intended to establish the lens through which we critique scripted curriculum, since the term democracy, through wide usage, has come to indicate many different things to different people. In light of this conception of democracy, we raise the question of whether scripted curriculum either models or prepares students to engage in this conscious and participatory social reproduction by evaluating scripted curriculum in relation to central democratic values. We argue that scripted curriculum, both as it is implemented in current practice and in any possible form, fails to satisfy the democratic values that should be inherent in our educational practices. As a result, it represents a further infringement on the democratic potential of public education in the United States. While our overarching argument is primarily conceptual, our claims build upon the empirical literature that illustrates elements of the implementation of scripted curricula, their effects, and teachers' responses to its usage.

Moreover, we argue that even if scripted curriculum in its most ideal form were to reinforce certain democratic aims, its fundamentally undemocratic foundations would still render it undesirable. We advocate instead for increased professional autonomy of teachers, particularly over their curriculum and its implementation, and suggest that their intellectual freedom constitutes a necessary feature of democratic education in schools. Although in this paper we

focus on the specific characteristics of scripted curriculum as incarnate within the US education system, our critique is broadly generalizable to the usage of scripted curriculum within any democratic context, and we will discuss briefly the rise of scripted curriculum within the international education reform movement before our concluding remarks.

Scripted Curriculum: A Brief History in the United States

Notwithstanding its recent ascent to popularity, varying degrees of scripting in teaching materials have been used as a strategy for managing content delivery going back almost 200 years in the United States. Scripted curriculum was initially and, until the last few decades, solely associated with reading instruction, and emerged as a byproduct of the advent of the textbook. In its nascent form, it started in the early to mid-1800s and took the form of elaborate lesson plans accompanied by suggestions for instructors (Venezky, 1990). Its formulation as an actual script, however, came half a century later, in 1888, in a supplemental text to the Monroe Reader textbook series titled 'How to Teach Reading.' This text was written by Lewis Baxter Monroe's—publisher of the Monroe Reader—spouse, Adeleine, and constituted one of the first publications of teacher guidelines that included 'suggestions and often complete scripts' (p. 25). Since the early twentieth century, scripted curriculum has come to be associated with the tradition of scientific management that was co-opted into the field of education by John Franklin Bobbit in the early-1900s (Au, 2011). Scientific management aimed to streamline the performance of tasks by ordering 'the elements of that task in the most efficient sequence' (Kliebard, 1995, p. 82), a legacy that can be seen quite evidently in the highly structured, step-wise language of contemporary scripted curricula (Au, 2011). With the rise of scientific management, the nature of scripted curriculum began to shift from suggestive to prescriptive.

Contemporary models of scripted curriculum such as Direct Instruction and Success for All were created between the 1960s and 1980s specifically to address the needs of 'at risk' or 'disadvantaged' students and were often implemented as part of plans for comprehensive school reform (Beatty, 2011). These models became central to reform strategies in the late 1990s, when both New York City and Los Angeles mandated the usage of scripted reading curricula such as Success for All and Open Court (respectively) in all low-performing schools (Milosovic, 2007). These reform strategies were both expanded and funded through the controversial Reading First program set up by NCLB. Reading First was a reform effort created in response to the National Reading Panel's (NRP) large-scale review of research regarding how children learn to read. As a result of the NRP's analysis of approximately 100,000 studies, the Panel concluded that 'the most effective course of reading instruction included explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, [and] phonics' (NRP cited by Metcalf, 2002, p. 20). This new and methodologically explicit definition of what constituted 'scientifically-based' reading instruction was used to delimit the types of curricular programs that would receive federal funding per the Reading First initiative in NCLB (Coles, 2012). Programs that did not explicitly reflect these ideas of good reading instruction would no longer be paid for by the government, which particularly pressured schools serving low income students toward these types of curricula, since these schools were heavily reliant on federal Title I funding (Ede, 2006). Curriculum publishers quickly responded to the demand for materials that met this new, more stringent requirement, and developed programs which met the suggestions of explicitness and systematicity by scripting out precisely what reading teachers would say at each point in their lesson. Although the language in Reading First was later changed from 'scientifically-based' to 'evidence-based,' thus broadening the diversity of reading curricula that could be eligible for funded usage, the

legislation's early phrasing catalyzed widespread adoption of scripted curricula within schools serving primarily poor and working-class students (Ede, 2006), which was, after all, the population of students that these materials were designed to teach.

The usage of scripted curricula was further accelerated in many states by the sudden implementation of the CCSS, as teachers and administrators scrambled to understand and successfully teach the new standards (Barrett, Burns Thomas, & Timberlake, 2018). The CCSS also resulted in a broader spectrum of topics being taught using scripted curricula; where previously scripts had been primarily used for reading instruction, increased standardization and accountability incentivized schools to adopt scripts that rigorously planned and paced teaching in all subjects. As an illustration, New York state published a set of free scripted curricular materials entitled EngageNY that provided curricula for grades K–12 for Reading, Math, and Social Studies in order to help teachers meet the newly adopted standards (Timberlake, Burns Thomas, & Barrett, 2017). The popularity of these materials can be illustrated by a 2016 EdWeek report that EngageNY had approximately 13.3 million yearly users (Cavanaugh, 2016). Not only does scripted curriculum explicitly address all grade-level standards, but it has the added benefit that it can easily be adopted by inexperienced teachers, either those teaching outside their subject specialization or those who lack traditional training or experience (Milner, 2013). With the increasing popularity of alternative routes to classroom entry, such as Teach for America, a script can serve as a quick fix to limited expertise (Carl, 2014).

Quantitative research on achievement outcomes for scripted instruction as a general category is limited (McIntyre, Rightmyer, & Petrosko, 2008), with most studies focusing on particular reading curricula such as Direct Instruction (Ryder, Burton, & Silberg, 2006; Stockard, 2010), Success for All (Borman et al., 2007; Slavin, Lake, Davis, & Madden, 2011; Slavin &

Madden, 2006)[1], or Open Court (Borman, Dowling, & Schneck, 2008; Vaden-Kiernan et al., 2018). The existent research, however, indicates mixed (and mostly quite dated) results regarding its effects on academic outcomes. The qualitative body of literature has focused primarily on teachers' responses to the adoption (or imposition) of scripted curriculum. Teachers' reactions vary substantially: while some find the curricula to be helpful in structuring the standards, others feel that the scripts deprive them of professional autonomy (Barrett et al., 2018; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; Cwikla, 2007; Griffith, 2008) and prevent them from appropriately addressing the needs of their students (Carl, 2014; Owens, 2010). Macgillivray, Lassiter Ardell, Sauceda Curwen, and Palma (2004) even go so far as to characterize the implementation of scripted curricula as 'colonizing' teachers' practices by redefining their roles, restricting their autonomy, and naturalizing their dependence on scripts. While the effectiveness of these curricula is indeterminate and teacher responses are mixed but slanting toward negative, schools continue to utilize scripted programs even in the absence of financially coercive measures like Reading First. Although perhaps their utilization is a function of our high-stakes testing paradigm, with administrators attempting to maximize students' exposure to tested materials through scientific management-style practices, empirical research addressing the motivations of principals and other school leaders in adopting these curricula for their districts would be a welcome addition to this body of literature.

It is also important to note that 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. Recognizing the disparities between different environments, Barrett et al. (2018) created two broad categories of usage:

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[1] It is important to mention that Slavin and Madden, who are co-authors in all cited studies on Success for All, are the founders of the Success for All Foundation.

certain schools and districts encouraged teachers to *adapt* the curriculum, while others pressured

teachers to *adopt* it. Teachers in schools that *adapted* scripted curricula were encouraged to use

the curriculum as a resource, but could omit or supplement whatever activities, projects, or topics

they thought appropriate to enable their students to meet the standards. Teachers in schools who

adopted the curriculum were expected to read the script without modification, perform all of the

activities as written, and decorate their classrooms with the supplemental materials that the

curriculum provided. Whether administrators take on a policy of adapting or adopting seems to

have a substantial impact on teachers' perceptions of scripted curriculum, with adapting teachers

appreciating it as a structuring force for the curriculum, while adopting teachers feel insulted at

the loss of their autonomy (Timberlake et al., 2017).

Why Democracy?

Before we begin our assessment of scripted curriculum on the basis of democratic

standards, it is necessary to provide a justification as to why we consider such an endeavor

important. In other words, why should we care about whether scripted curriculum promotes or

hinders the spread of democratic values in schools? The simple answer is because we live in a

liberal democracy. The United States is a country built on democratic foundations, and the need

for the development of a universal system of education came as a result of the emerging need to

educate citizens to be ready to and capable of participating in a democratic society. Since many

doubted the ability of a democratic state to survive, the leaders of the nation decided that

educating citizens to that end was essential. If democracy was to survive, citizens needed to be

knowledgeable enough to make informed decisions about how to vote; they 'had to be well

informed, and prepared to critically assess the arguments and opinions of the day' (Rury, 2016,

p. 43). Aside from the historical justification, however, being the only polity that allows

everyone a degree of voice in governance, democracy is an inherently desirable system. It is a system that gives everyone the right to live in accordance to their own vision of the good life without being deterred from doing so—so long as they do not infringe upon other people's liberties. However, for such a system to function people need to be capable of engaging in public deliberation for the purpose of persuading one another and making collective decisions that must satisfy everyone, to the greatest degree possible.

It follows that democracy is multifaceted. In one sense it is a polity—representative democracy—which gives people the right to vote for those who will represent them and have a role in their governance in their capacity as voters. In another sense it is what John Dewey (1980) referred to as 'a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience' (p. 93). This second sense lies at the heart of a liberal democracy; it is prerequisite to a well-functioning liberal democracy. It is by virtue of living together as democratic citizens on equal terms and of communicating with one another that we can ameliorate our living conditions, adjust to our ever-changing environment, and adequately respond to the new challenges that we encounter. A channel of communication that is open to everyone is essential for a democracy to avoid reverting to an oligarchy or aristocracy. Many will argue that when it comes to solving problems, certain people with relevant expertise are more suited to address said problems. While giving those with relevant expertise a considerable voice in relevant issues is important, everyone must be able to participate in democratic deliberations as everyone contributes a unique perspective shared by no one else. Open democratic deliberation allows us to understand each other and our society's complexity. It is the means for discovering the best solutions to the problems that we face. Only when everyone has a voice are we capable of utilizing the full human potential that society has to offer and finding solutions to the challenges we face. As Dewey (1988) put it,

democracy entails a 'faith in the potentialities of human nature' (p. 226) regardless of race, class, gender and other differences. It entails free communicative interaction and exchange of experiences with the purpose of learning from one another and thereby utilizing every resource possible when addressing those challenges.

Given this account of democracy, education for a democratic society cannot and should not be limited to a narrow civic education about laws, rights, and voting responsibilities. Rather, like democracy, education for a democracy has a dual aim. One aim is to educate students about civic engagement. This involves learning the mechanics of a democracy and anything else that one must know to effectively participate in a democracy. The second, and more important aim, is to foster democratic communities in schools. These communities must embody the Deweyan ideal of democracy discussed above and to do so must be characterized by democratic relations. Students should be able to associate with one another and, informed about everyone's opinions, collectively make decisions regarding their community. Amy Gutmann (1999), following Dewey, refers to two 'preconditions of democratic deliberation' which must be cultivated in schools: 'the recognition of common interests among citizens, and the related commitment to reconsider our individual interests in light of understanding the interests of others' (pp. 76–77). To cultivate these preconditions, students must not only be active members of their community and active participants in their education, but they should also freely associate with other students, learn from and about each other, and make decisions concerning their education that in the greatest degree possible advance the interests of all members of their community. In this sense, democratic education entails that 'all citizens must be educated so as to have a chance to share in self-consciously shaping the structure of their society' (p. 46). For this to happen, Gutmann argues, education must not be in any way repressive or discriminatory against any

member of society. These conditions are essentially founded on the same grounds as Dewey's claim that we must have faith in everyone's capacity to share and foster an environment where everyone can contribute. We will come back to these two conditions later in the paper.

In addition to this dual aim of democratic education, education in a democratic society should satisfy one more condition; it should cultivate '*democratic* virtue' which, according to Gutmann (1999), is 'the ability to deliberate, and hence to participate in conscious social reproduction' (p. 46). Democratic virtue is an important characteristic for any citizen in a democracy. It entails that every citizen must be allowed and able to engage in democratic deliberation and that through this deliberation they can become a part of the collective will that dictates how to shape society, including how to educate future generations (given that education plays a fundamental role in shaping society). This points to a second fundamental characteristic of education in a democratic society; it must not only cultivate democratic values but its very aims and practices must also be a result of such democratic values, namely, of democratic deliberation. As students must have a say in what education they receive, everyone in society must have a say in what education their society offers. This relation becomes somewhat cyclical, since students' education according to democratic values enables their later contribution to the social determination of how students should be educated to continue the progression of democracy.

Meira Levinson (2012) provides a distinction that nicely delineates these two basic aspects of education within a democratic society. She distinguishes between 'education *for* democracy' and 'education *within* democracy' (pp. 258–259). The former refers to the aforementioned dual aim of democratic education: to instil knowledge on civic engagement and to foster the ability to actively participate in a democratic society. Levinson describes this aspect

as 'how schools can help prepare all students to be empowered democratic citizens' (p. 259). The latter refers to the ability of citizens to control and have a voice in the education their society offers and the citizens it aims to develop and, thereby, the ability to influence their society's future. This aspect, according to Levinson, dictates 'the extent to which public schools must be subject to democratic deliberation and citizen control in order to be legitimate' (p. 259). With this distinction in mind, Levinson discusses how the standards, assessment, and accountability (SAA) movement that emerged in the wake of NCLB may serve the purposes of democratic education. She argues that with regard to education *for* democracy SAA do not have much to offer. That is to say, SAA do not explicitly promote any of the aims that democratic education in the former sense would provide. Of course, one can argue that setting standards for high quality civic education goes far with regard to promoting education *for* democracy, and assessment and accountability ensure that such an education is implemented well in all contexts.

Though this is certainly true, Levinson (2012) argues that SAA is best used to promote democratic education in the latter sense of education *within* democracy. SAA make it so every member of society can be aware of what is happening in education and, consequently, can exercise their democratic rights to shape the educational standards as they see fit, either through participating in public deliberation or through voting for representatives who serve their interests. Moreover, SAA go a long way to promote the public good. They do so by benefitting all members of society equally by safeguarding the quality of the education they and their fellow citizens receive. Levinson compares the way SAA can help guarantee the public good to how food and health standards guarantee public safety. Given that the increasing standardization evident in scripted curriculum is an outgrowth of the SAA movement, examining how scripted curriculum can serve or hinder the democratic aims of education is a natural and necessary

continuation of Levinson's democratic analysis of SAA. Given the importance of educating citizens for participating in and consciously reproducing a democratic society, assessing the role that scripted curriculum can play as a conduit for such an education is crucial. As new educational policies, techniques, and technologies emerge, we must continue to regard them with scrutiny to determine whether they enhance or reduce democratic interactions and values. It is to this purpose that we will examine the democratic potential of scripted curriculum in the remainder of our paper.

Scripted Curriculum and Democratic Values

In our endeavor to assess the democratic value of scripted curriculum, we will use Levinson's (2012) framework for evaluating the SAA movement. As mentioned above, the current highly standardized scripted curricula that are used in schools are an outgrowth of the SAA movement and so Levinson's framework, though it does not explicitly address scripted curriculum, can provide us a powerful tool for assessing its democratic potential. Regarding democratic potential, Levinson identifies six values that SAA might in theory promote: (1) 'equity,' (2) 'efficiency,' (3) 'transparency,' (4) 'democratic dialogue and deliberation,' (5) 'enabling of more robust government,' and (6) 'freedom and diversity' (pp. 263–268). We will examine how an ideal form of scripted curriculum—one where all positive conditions are maximized—contributes to each of these values. It is important to qualify that, for the purpose of such a theoretical analysis, we will intentionally disregard historical contingencies that have shaped the current socioeconomic and educational landscape in order to consider arguments suggesting that the implementation of scripted curriculum could, at least in theory, address long-standing educational challenges that are the outcome of such contingencies. Once we present the theoretical argument in favor of scripted curriculum, we will proceed to investigate the effects of

its real-world application, now contextualized within historical contingencies and our current socioeconomic landscape, and show that both anticipated and unanticipated shortcomings outweigh potential positive effects and render its usage harmful to democratic values.

Scripted Curriculum in Theory

The first value, *equity*, serves as the basic rationale behind standardization in general and the adoption of scripted curricular materials in particular by emphasizing 'that all young people deserve the same quality education' (Levinson, 2012, p. 263). Notwithstanding years of attempts to shrink the achievement gap, disparities along racial and socioeconomic lines persist and continue to problematize educators and policymakers. Historically and contemporarily, schools serving minority and low income students have experienced more difficulty accessing sufficient resources and skilled, experienced teachers as compared to schools serving more wealthy, majority-white students (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Scripted, 'scientifically-based' curricula have been touted to potentially address both of these resource deficits. By providing schools with pre-packaged, 'scientifically-based' curricula, all students would be able to access a quality curriculum that would theoretically enable them to meet the newly rigorized state standards, essentially ensuring an 'equality of access.' Additionally, scripted curricula could potentially solve another problem that urban schools face: the disproportionate presence of new and inexperienced teachers. Scripted curricula are designed in such a way as to direct the teacher in the organization and instruction of curriculum; although schools implement the 'scripts' with varying levels of fidelity, the scripted curriculum provides a powerful support to teachers with less subject-matter expertise or pedagogical know-how.

Scripted curriculum, as the ultimate form of standardization, ostensibly neutralizes these resource deficits by guaranteeing students an all-inclusive, high-quality curriculum that directly

aligns with state standards and is, in theory, 'teacher-proof'—meaning that it can be delivered by any teacher regardless of subject knowledge or prior experience. It would seem, then, that scripted curriculum increases equity by enabling all students to access a high-quality educational experience, regardless of the skill level of the teacher who facilitates it. This ability of scripted curriculum to bypass the teacher and offer a standardized delivery of the subject-matter also provides a solution for the high turnover rates these areas face by making it possible for any new teacher to come in at any point in the year and still be able to teach the class identically with her predecessor.

Although the value of equity provides the strongest justification—at least from an ethical standpoint—for the implementation of scripted curriculum, these curricula are also attractive because they increase measures of *efficiency*. In the education world, efficiency can be thought of as maximizing educational output with minimal input of resources. Although efficiency may seem to be more of an economic value than a democratic one, it is also highly valuable for democracies in that it allows for responsible resource allocation and use. It, therefore, guarantees that taxpayer money is not frivolously wasted on unsuccessful policies (Levinson, 2012). Scripted curriculum increases efficiency in at least four ways: (1) it enables administrators to spend less on expensive professional development for inexperienced staff, (2) it increases ease of surveillance for the purposes of teacher control and accountability, (3) it provides pre-organized instruction that is not impacted by the idiosyncrasies of the individual teacher, and, finally, (4) due to its adherence to scientific standards it leaves important decision-making to higher ranking educators and administrators who have greater expertise than teachers—more or less experienced alike. This last aspect, stemming from the tradition of scientific management, makes teaching

more efficient by providing clear and explicit instructions on how the teachers should enact even the smallest details of their work (Au, 2011).

The third democratic value is *transparency*. Scripted curriculum theoretically could increase transparency by enabling any interested party to access the material. This could give parents a window into exactly what is happening within the classroom on a daily basis and give them access to the language that their children are accustomed to hearing in various academic disciplines. Especially for subjects in which pedagogical methods have changed substantially over the last generation, such as math, dissemination of the scripts could empower parents to better assist struggling students and reinforce school lessons at home. Relatedly, the increased access to detailed curriculum would encourage the growth of Levinson's fourth value, *democratic dialogue and deliberation*. Greater access enables greater engagement; providing parents access to the lessons that their children experience in schools has the potential to open up community dialogue about academic topics, but also might encourage communities to consider precisely what kind of future citizens they believe should be formed through the process of education.

The fifth value that scripted curriculum might promote is the *enabling of more robust government*. Scripted curricula are a result of decision-making based on the collective expertise of curriculum producers, independent researchers, and governing and regulating agencies. This stands in contrast to the traditional practice of having individual teachers make personal choices on how to run their class and organize the implementation of curriculum. As Levinson (2012) states, '[t]he tyranny of the individual teacher exercising her own judgment about what and how to teach is replaced by the authority of the democratic collective' (pp. 266–267). Scripted curriculum not only attenuates choice and teacher judgment with regard to subject-matter but

also with regard to the delivery of the subject-matter to the students. The teacher, potentially lacking knowledge or experience in effective pedagogical techniques, may surrender power and discretion to external authority which, ideally, represents the pinnacle of the collective knowledge produced by our democratic society.

Finally, the sixth and last set of values that scripted curriculum might promote are those of *freedom and diversity*. This final set of values, unlike the previous, is one that scripted curriculum, even in its most ideal form, does not appear to foster. If anything, its scripted and, thus, predetermined and standardized nature provides enough ground to believe that it limits freedom and diversity. However, this might be considered a small price to pay if indeed the other five values are promoted to the extent mentioned above, since educational equity might lead to greater freedom in later life and democratic participation constitutes a form of diversity on its own. Unfortunately, however, the implementation of scripted curriculum seems to produce much different results than those suggested by our consideration of its potential, as we will show in the following section.

Scripted Curriculum in Practice

Now that we have seen how scripted curriculum, in its most ideal form, might promote democratic values, we will examine whether it indeed does so in practice. We begin by considering *equity*. For the purposes of this paper, we understand equity not as simple equality of access to resources but instead as equality of opportunity, which requires compensatory allocation of resources in proportion to students' social disadvantages. Compensatory allocation is necessary to make up for extra-curricular impediments which hinder students from taking advantage of the resources they are given access to. A distribution of resources that favors less advantaged students is especially important to compensate for factors such as poverty that are

related to lower academic achievement (Owens, 2010). Though scripted curriculum is conducive to equity in the sense of providing equality of access to resources, it is clearly deficient when equity as equality of opportunity is considered. We had mentioned the positive characteristic that scripted curriculum might increase equality of access to high-quality curriculum. However, it is important to note one somewhat unsurprising disparity: scripted curricula are disproportionately used in schools serving students of color in low-income communities (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ede, 2006). Many early versions of scripted curriculum were even designed intentionally with this population of students in mind, under the assumption that particular modes of instruction were necessary to overcome the cultural and material 'disadvantages' that these students experienced in their home and school environments (Beatty, 2011). However, scripted curricula seem to produce no better results than unscripted alternatives (McIntyre et al., 2008)[2], especially when unaccompanied by positive relational structures within schools (Guccione, 2011). Thus, instead of providing equality of access, scripted curriculum facilitates the creation of a stratified curricular system: on the lower tier we have scripted curricula, purportedly suited to the needs of low-income children, while on the upper tier are student-centered, inquiry-based, and flexible curricula, which address the needs of their more affluent peers.

However, even if a scripted curriculum was adopted by schools universally, it would still fall short of accomplishing the ideal of equity. By presenting every student with the exact same content in the exact same way, scripted curriculum overlooks pre-existing inequalities and does not suggest or provide space for structures intended to amend them. If we are truly invested in pursuing equitable educational practices, we cannot settle with providing vulnerable populations with 'good enough' resources that are designed to standardize their educational experience to the

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[2] See also the research on specific curricular programs cited above.

greatest extent possible. Resources of the highest quality, along with programs and teachers that are responsive to the unique needs of student populations, are necessary in order to rectify systemic disadvantages. An equitable distribution of resources would ensure that disadvantaged students receive appropriate levels of attention depending on their needs, an arrangement which clearly requires a more personalized curriculum, not a more standardized one.

Notwithstanding scripted curriculum's lack of consideration for pre-existing inequalities, one might assume that the value of equity might be advanced by skillful teachers *adapting* these lessons to meet the needs of their students. However, there are two problems that prevent the actualization of this possibility. First, the use of scripted curriculum enables schools to hire less experienced or untrained teachers, as in the case of teachers without a background in education who enter the classroom through alternative entry programs like Teach for America which provide little pedagogical training and often place teachers in schools that utilize scripted curricula (Carl, 2014). Thus the condition of a skillful teacher is often unmet. Secondly, Timberlake et al. (2017) have observed that the use of scripted curriculum has an interesting indirect effect: it tends to narrow teachers' understanding of equity in the classroom. When interviewed, teachers consistently indicated the belief that equity involves merely holding students to the same high standards and providing equal access to the same content. Their comments indicate a conceptual reduction of equity to equality of access, without considering whether students are indeed able to access the subject-matter intellectually. This data suggests that even if the condition of a skillful teacher is met, the teacher is potentially unlikely to view equity-minded adaptation as necessary or desirable.

While these programs provide students access to a purportedly high-quality curriculum, they discourage the interventions that are often necessary for academically struggling students to

be able to access the subject-matter in the curriculum, even when teachers are concerned with equity-minded adaptation. These interventions are discouraged, in part, due to the sheer magnitude of the scripted material to be covered (Milosovic, 2007), which further exacerbates the well-known phenomenon of narrowing curricula to focus on subjects and content that are likely to be tested (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Levinson, 2012; Milner, 2013). With instructional time as a limited resource, teachers who are already struggling to maintain pacing are unable to integrate supplementary activities that are specifically tailored to the learning needs of their students. Additionally, there are many situations in which teachers are discouraged to modify the curriculum in any way, being told that simply through exposure to these well-structured curricula, struggling students will eventually catch up to their peers (MacGillivray et al., 2004). This belief that mere exposure will result in learning reveals the conflation of a superficial understanding of equality of access—as simple exposure—with equity in the more rich sense as leading to equality of opportunity, a confusion with the potential for devastating consequences to the most vulnerable student populations. Furthermore, the conflation of these terms leads to an assumption that any student failure occurs as a result of individual deficiencies on the part of the student rather than institutional and structural inequalities.

The next characteristic we discussed was that of *efficiency*, and we mentioned four ways in which scripted curriculum might increase efficiency. It seems that in practice scripted curriculum does indeed increase efficiency, although it seems to be efficiency of a perverse type. The first three examples we gave—reducing professional development expenditures for inexperienced and undertrained teachers, increasing control through surveillance and accountability, and providing pre-organized lessons that are not subject to the idiosyncrasies of individual teachers—all involve a particular kind of efficiency that can be most clearly

understood by considering the factory-inspired logic of the scientific management movement. The goal of this movement was to minimize the inconsistency inherent in individuals and replace it with a set of mechanical behaviors that could be performed regardless of the actor. This same logic is evident in the 'efficiency' enabled by scripted curriculum. Scripted curriculum eliminates the imperative of individual and collective professional expertise, since the curriculum can, in theory, be delivered without any requisite subject knowledge. The teacher is interchangeable in the same manner that a deskilled factory worker is interchangeable. When each teacher works according to a particular script, managerial control is facilitated since it becomes easier to determine whether material is being delivered with minimal 'waste' and in accordance with clearly defined parameters. This enables school administrators to enforce conformity and penalize deviation, resulting in the creation of a uniform product. However, this type of efficiency is detrimental to a democratic society. By virtue of its character, democracy, unlike authoritarian governing systems, appeals to the individuality of each citizen as a contributing factor to the well-being of society in general. Democratic efficiency would therefore be in line with a Deweyan ideal of social efficiency which promotes individuality, rather than undermining it by placing teachers in an 'assembly-line' type teaching regime. The social efficiency necessary for democracy to flourish 'is attained not by negative constraint but by positive use of native individual capacities in occupations having a social meaning' (Dewey, 1980, p. 125).

Finally, we had commented that efficiency is increased by relocating decision-making under the purview of curriculum developers who structure scripted curricula according to scientific standards. This proposition also comes into question when one considers the 'scientifically-based' criteria for reading instruction upon which many popular scripted curricular

programs were based following the Reading First initiative in NCLB. First of all, the science-based criteria of both Reading First and the NRP report have been criticized for being unsound (Coles, 2000, 2003, 2012; Metcalf, 2002), and led to the adoption of 'specific commercial programs' at the expense of 'well-researched reading programs.' This policy, though it increased students' decoding ability, did not improve reading comprehension skills which led to declining reading scores on international assessments (Darling-Hammond, 2010, pp. 13–14).

However, whether the criteria were 'scientific' enough is not the only issue. What is interesting is that the NRP (2000) report was itself misused by policymakers and Reading First scripted curriculum advocates. As stated earlier, the adoption of scripted curricula was largely based on the necessity of teaching students 'phonemic awareness,' yet the members of the NRP mention that phonemic awareness, though important, is only one aspect of reading instruction; it is merely 'a means to an end;' the end being the application of 'that knowledge in their reading and writing.' The panel's emphasis on comprehension being the 'essence of reading' is telling of the fact that phonemic awareness alone is insufficient as the role it serves is instrumental rather than essential to reading. More importantly, the panel acknowledges that the role of the teacher is crucial when it comes to reading instruction, something that the structures of many scripted curricula seem to disregard. The panel warns that scripted curricula 'may reduce teacher interest and motivation.' This is a problem since a standardized curriculum is not enough to ensure that all students will learn; '[t]eachers should be able to assess the needs of the individual students and tailor instruction to meet specific needs.' Standardized curricula, though efficient, are not effective for all students. For this reason, even though the NRP report states that scripted curricula can be effective, 'teachers need to be flexible . . . in order to adapt it to individual student needs.' The NRP thus explicitly emphasizes that users of scripted curricula should adapt,

not adopt, something that is not the case for many schools that use scripted curricula. A final implication, according to the NRP, is that teachers should receive 'evidence-based preservice training and ongoing inservice training to select (or develop) and implement the most appropriate phonics instruction effectively.'

All this suggests that concentrating decision-making power outside of the classroom does not necessarily result in more effective or efficient strategies for instruction, even if it does enable more efficient management of employees performing the instruction. It seems that implementers of the Reading First initiative selected elements of the report that suited their purposes of standardization while neglecting the NRP's claims on the necessity of individualized instruction and teacher competence. This suggests that social efficiency—which according to Dewey is essential for democracy to flourish—was sacrificed on the altar of managerial efficiency, to the benefit of corporate interests, such as curriculum publishing companies and others within educational administration, that stood to profit from it. If we take student learning to be the primary and uncompromisable goal of schooling, and there is no doubt that most educators will, the increases in managerial efficiency cannot justify the compromises to student learning which came as a result of increased standardization and the adoption of scripted curricula.

We will address the next three values—transparency, democratic dialogue and deliberation, and enabling of more robust government—together, since the implications of scripted curriculum interact in an interrelated manner with each of these values. While, as we stated, scripted curriculum could increase the value of *transparency* by providing parents and communities access to the curriculum, this benefit only occurs if schools take the initiative to disseminate the materials, which they are not likely to do either due to issues of copyright or

simple logistics. Moreover, even if every parent received a copy of their child's curriculum, this would still yield unequal transparency due the difficulty that parents with less education might have in deciphering and evaluating the content. Thus, even full transparency would yield greater advantage to students whose parents are more educated and affluent. The impossibility of 'equal' transparency would in turn affect less educated parents' ability to engage in *democratic dialogue and deliberation* in determining the suitability and desirability of the curriculum for fulfilling their children's needs. However, even if full transparency could be maintained, with all parents having equal understanding of their students' curriculum, it is unlikely to stimulate substantial democratic dialogue and deliberation for the simple reason that the system, as it is designed, is not publicly determined; outside of participation in the democratically-elected local school board (if they still have one) the public does not have a potential role in shaping the implementation of curriculum and does not have an established avenue to participate in the development of curricular standards or materials.

Although this is generally also the case when considering non-scripted curricula, the problem is exacerbated further since the teacher, who serves as a connection between the curriculum and the local community, is also taken out of the deliberation process. Rather than thoroughly considering students' capabilities, needs, and desires, the teacher is encouraged (and sometimes forced) to proceed without regard, relying solely on the curriculum to provide the information she needs. This not only does a disservice to the students in her classroom, but also stifles the individual spirit in a manner that clearly contradicts the democratic ideal of faith in individual capabilities. Instead, the teacher's incapacity is assumed, and the responsibility for curriculum is passed up a chain to the 'best and brightest' who, it is assumed, through their overwhelming merit have naturally ascended there. These higher authorities make decisions for

the teacher, forming the character of her classroom life without regard to the particularities that she is best acquainted with. Deliberation regarding what and how students should be learning is effectively shut down, and a univocal authority is imposed upon classrooms.

As a result, the potential for *more robust government* is also thwarted. Decisions regarding appropriate curriculum have been moved out of the hands of local teachers, schools, and communities and are instead centralized at the level of experts and curriculum manufacturers. This concentration of power is particularly undemocratic since it is profit incentives and top-down mandates that guide curriculum design rather than the benefit of the students (Metcalf, 2002). Inside the classroom, similar issues are replicated on a smaller scale. The curriculum-centered pedagogy and predetermined question and answer cycles preclude the possibility for the genuine deliberation that would help to prepare students for later civic life. Students instead interact with an unyielding bureaucratic mouthpiece (their teacher) who constrains their interactions in order to accomplish externally-determined goals. That neither students nor teachers take any role in determining the content or structure of their educational experience seems dangerous in that it accustoms individuals both to unquestioning conformity and passivity in the face of authority.

The risk of conformity and passivity brings us to our final democratic values: *freedom and diversity*. As acknowledged in the previous section, it is difficult to conceive of a way that scripted curriculum could increase freedom and diversity. The use of a pre-packaged curriculum constrains the freedom of both teachers and students, and minimizes the recognition of diversity in the classroom. The administrative pressure that teachers experience with regard to fidelity and pacing seems to discourage substantive, organic classroom interactions. Park and Bridges-Rhoads (2012) suggest that following a script substantially changes the manner in which teachers

engage with their students, encouraging 'teachers to interact in more automatic and less thoughtful ways with their children' (p. 321). This excessive standardization of curricular material precludes any responsiveness to the cultures and experiences of the students that the teacher serves. As a result, the curriculum serves to marginalize the experience of individuals who are not affiliated with the dominant groups producing the curriculum, groups which increasingly have an absolute power over what and whose knowledge is worth transmitting (Apple, 2004). With regard to students, particularly the disadvantaged students who are the primary recipients of this type of curriculum, they increasingly experience the institution of schooling as a rigid and unresponsive entity, one that cares little for their individuality and does not work *for* them, but rather, for its own sake. This type of early experience with a foundational institution cultivates an implicit understanding in these students that they are not entitled to any sort of special treatment, or even treatment that recognizes and respects their fundamental individuality; they are not expected to be participants but rather to conform to the contours of the institution. These constraints on teacher and student behavior create dynamics that threaten the maintenance of freedom and diversity that is vital for healthy democratic functioning.

The Undemocratic Foundations of Scripted Curriculum

Now that we have seen that, in its real-world application, scripted curriculum is democratically detrimental, we will explore one more possibility, namely, whether scripted curriculum could enhance democratic values in education *if* its implementation matched the ideal described above. As we argue, even if scripted curriculum fulfilled its promises it would still remain inherently undemocratic and as such be harmful to the democratic foundations of our educational system. This part of our argument is important because we wish to dissuade administrators and policymakers who see no results from persisting on the grounds that it is not

working due to erroneous implementation. Rather, we want to show that even if they managed to implement it 'correctly'—whatever that might entail—and to yield the best possible results, it would still be harmful to our democratic values and, therefore, should not be pursued as a policy.

The fundamental basis for this argument is that scripted curriculum, by its very nature, undermines the democratic foundations of society and consequently education and, thus, models an undemocratic way of living to students. We will start by once again invoking Dewey (1987), who has presented the most famous version of this argument. It goes as follows:

> The foundation of democracy is faith in the capacities of human nature; faith in human intelligence, and in the power of pooled and cooperative experience. . . . Every autocratic and authoritarian scheme of social action rests on a belief that the needed intelligence is confined to a superior few who because of inherent natural gifts are endowed with the ability and the right to control the conduct of others; laying down principles and rules and directing the ways in which they are carried out. (p. 219)

The freedom that democracy entails, Dewey claims, is freedom to have a voice in one's occupation, a voice about the things to which one is capable of contributing, because in a true democracy it is recognized that everyone is capable of contributing something. In the case of teachers, the value of their contribution lies, if nowhere else, in their direct association with their students and therefore their first-hand knowledge of the problems they face and the most fitting solutions to these problems (Dewey, 1987). It is true that social science can tell us a lot about groups of students, but in addition to being members of groups, students are also individual human beings and as such face unique problems that require unique solutions. It follows that scripted curricula are incapable of promoting true democratic values simply because they deny teachers the right to have a voice in their profession, to use their classroom experience and knowledge of their students to formulate professional judgments and to have the discretion to

guide their teaching practices accordingly. Knowledge of what teaching methods are best for each student and where each student's strengths and weaknesses lie is necessary for learning to occur, and a curriculum that bypasses the authority of the only person in the educational chain capable of discerning each individual student's needs, is not only harmful for student learning but also for the democratic foundations of education, which should normally allow everyone with relevant experience to have a voice and exercise discretion on their area of competence.

This line of reasoning can help explain some of the deeply problematic effects of excessive standardization such as the deprofessionalization of teaching (Biesta, 2015), the demoralization of teachers (Santoro & Morehouse, 2011; Santoro, 2018), and the difficulty of recruiting highly-qualified teachers in high-poverty schools. Naturally, as Dewey (1977) predicted more than a century ago, this system facilitates the hiring of the more inexperienced or unskilled teachers. The lack of skills and experience possessed by these teacher populations, in turn, provides grounds for legitimizing the use of scripted curricula even further. Dewey (1977, 1987) asked: if teachers are not capable of making important decisions about their job, how do we expect them to be capable to even follow the orders that experts give them correctly? The obvious answer to this question is that we cannot expect them to do so, and the obvious outcome of such a mentality is the development of scripted curriculum—the means of doing away with the teacher's capacity as a human being and rendering her role completely machine-like. It will be no surprise then when teachers are replaced with computers which are equally, if not more capable of such machine-like processes than human beings.

That said, however, the threat to democracy by scripted curriculum does not merely lie in the stifling of teacher autonomy and teacher deprofessionalization, but also in the consequences that such programs hold for students. As Dewey (1977) puts it,

To subject mind to an outside and ready-made material is a denial of the ideal of democracy, which roots itself ultimately in the principle of moral, self-directing individuality. Misunderstanding regarding the nature of the freedom that is demanded for the child is so common that it may be necessary to emphasize the fact that it is primarily intellectual freedom, free play of mental attitude, and operation which are sought. (p. 235)

The rigidity of subject-matter in a scripted curriculum is certainly one form of suppressing students' intellectual freedom and hence their capacity to grow into autonomous citizens, especially when accompanied by standardized assessments and accountability measures. Scripted curriculum denies the teacher's ability to choose how to teach subject-matter, thereby rendering the material interesting and engaging only to the few whose disposition happens to agree with such teaching techniques. Everyone else is excluded, and the suppression of freedom and individuality which was mentioned in the previous section poses a direct threat not only to the democratic nature of schools but also to the students' abilities to become functional citizens in a democracy. This threat is manifest in the 'civic empowerment gap' that exists between privileged and marginalized populations, which is 'as large and as disturbing as the reading and math achievement gaps that have received significant national attention in recent years' (Levinson, 2012, pp. 31–32). It follows that democratic deliberation and dialogue in the long run suffer.

To explain the ramifications of this intellectual stultification of teachers and, in turn, students, we return to Gutmann and the two conditions that democratic education must satisfy: namely, that it must not repress any opinions or discriminate against any student or student group. Gutmann (1999) ascribes to teachers the role of 'cultivating the capacity for critical reflection' about common cultural and societal norms that are promoted by democratic governments. In that sense, the teacher's most important role is to 'uphold the principle of nonrepression by cultivating the capacity for democratic deliberation' (p. 76). 'The principle of

nonrepression,' Gutmann argues, 'prevents the state, and any group within it, from using education to restrict rational deliberation of competing conceptions of the good life and the good society' (p. 44). The teacher's role is, therefore, to make sure that students are exposed to a multitude of diverse values and are capable of engaging in democratic deliberation for the purpose of deciding what values they choose to adhere to as most conducive to their flourishing. For democratic deliberation to be realized and for better informed decisions to be made, all voices must be heard. Students, then, in their capacity as future citizens will be capable of making their own decisions and not mindlessly adhere to the societal values of previous generations. Furthermore, Gutmann extends the principle of nonrepression to derive the principle of nondiscrimination; that is to say, that no individual or group of people is to be repressed from expressing their opinions and views (p. 45). The principle of nondiscrimination is of particular importance given that groups of people have been systematically oppressed for decades, if not centuries, and have therefore been denied a voice in society. These are the same groups that are currently experiencing the use of scripted curriculum in their classrooms.

Scripted curriculum violates both the principle of nonrepression and of nondiscrimination; the former by hermetically structuring the classroom both temporally and with regard to content (thus leaving no time or space for democratic deliberation) and the latter by being used disproportionately with low income students (thereby stifling the ability of low income and minority students to develop a sense of democratic commitment and participation). It is important to mention that we are not claiming that this is done intentionally, yet the resulting policy is indisputably inequitable and undemocratic. Gutmann (1999) expresses this succinctly and explicitly in the following passage:

> Although a school board may establish the curriculum, it must not dictate how teachers choose to
>
> teach the established curriculum, as long as they do not discriminate against students or repress

reasonable points of view. Although a school board may control the textbooks teachers use, it may not control how teachers use those textbooks (within the same principled constraints). The rationale for so limiting democratic authority is straightforward: if primary [elementary and secondary] school teachers cannot exercise intellectual independence in their classrooms, they cannot teach students to be intellectually independent (p. 82).

The democratic authority that is limited here is that of the community and its elected representatives and we can extend this to the government and its elected representatives. This is certainly undemocratic in the sense of permitting imposition of the 'tyranny of the individual teacher' over the collective, that Levinson mentions. However, there are good reasons for this limiting and they come down to the two main points that were made in this section. First of all, the imposition of 'expert' authority (the authority of the few educational experts and curriculum providers) on all teaching practitioners (who overwhelmingly outnumber those 'experts') and without regard for the input they provide as practitioners and as the ones with direct access to students, is inherently undemocratic in itself. Moreover, the stifling of the intellectual independence of teachers as professionals stifles the intellectual independence of students as future citizens. This in itself is also a threat to democracy given that democracy depends not only on a multitude of diverse voices but also on people who are capable of thinking critically and making their own informed decisions.

That said, though it is not in the scope of this paper to discuss the role of the teaching profession more generally, we need to make a clarification with regard to the expertise presupposed in teacher professionalism that curbs democratic authority and that we have presented favorably thus far. We must, in other words, address the connection of teaching as a profession to democracy which has been implicit throughout our paper. This connection follows clearly from the role that Gutmann ascribes to teachers mentioned above, and how teachers qua

professionals play a crucial role for guarding the democratic aims of education. 'Understood as the degree of autonomy—or insulation from external control—necessary to fulfill the democratic functions of office,' Gutmann (1999) claims, 'professionalism completes rather than competes with democracy' (p. 77). What Gutmann means by this is that, notwithstanding the curbing of democratic authority by the teacher's professional autonomy, the reason for this curbing is to preserve the democratic values of education and society in the long run. Professional autonomy must not be used to give the teacher ultimate authority over their profession to the extent that their authority subverts the authority of every other stakeholder in education, such as administrators, students, parents, or the community. Every member of a democratic society has a stake in what happens in education and therefore every member must have a voice in what happens. In the presence of majoritarian forces, nonetheless, that threaten the very democratic ideal that gave them the power they enjoy, teachers must be able to preserve the intellectual autonomy to cultivate students' capacity for critical thinking and questioning the standards and norms of society. Only in this manner can society continue raising citizens who are capable of genuine democratic deliberation and who are capable of keeping the democratic values of that society alive. It is in this key point that the justification for teacher professional autonomy lies.

Although teachers have a pedagogical expertise that certainly gives greater weight to their opinion regarding educational practices than other members of society, their professional autonomy in a democracy cannot be solely justified on said expertise. Experts cannot refuse the right for people affected by societal structures, including education, to be a part of democratic deliberation in the society they inhabit, nor can experts refuse people the right to influence through democratic means the type of education their society offers—although it is reasonable to expect citizens and other stakeholders of education to trust the ability of teachers (provided they

are well trained and experienced) to make decisions that are good for children and society in general. Rather the strongest justification for teacher professional autonomy is that it is necessary for preserving the democratic values of society and the democratic nature of education. In Gutmann's (1999) words, '[t]he professionalism of teachers, properly defined, serves as a safeguard against repression and discrimination' (p. 88). How does such a safeguard therefore interact with a hyperstandardized scripted curriculum? The teacher as a professional must be able to dedicate class time to activities that foster democratic values. If such activities are absent from the curriculum, the teacher must make time, something difficult to do when teaching from a script. At the very least, if there is no way of avoiding the use of a scripted curriculum (a reality that many teachers currently face), the teacher must be skilled and flexible enough—as well as be given the freedom—to *adapt* a scripted curriculum to the needs of their class, rather than *adopt* it with fidelity eliminating any meaningful democratic interaction in the classroom. However, even the successful adaptation of scripted curricula is merely a half measure. The teacher must be able to preserve the nonrepression of all knowledge, ideas, and conversation indiscriminately, regardless of whether they are endorsed by the curriculum provider or not, if they are to foster a critical environment that can cultivate civically engaged citizens who are capable of meaningful democratic participation. It is to this end that teacher professional autonomy is crucial, and it is to this end that scripted curriculum poses a threat.

Scripted Curriculum in the International Context

Throughout this paper, we have shown the importance of a democratic education and why scripted curriculum is incompatible with it within the context of the United States. However, our analysis has wide bearing on trends in international education reform and intends to call awareness to the problematic elements of this type of hyper-standardization. Success for

All, a scripted reading program mentioned above, is widely used in the UK (Tracey, Chambers, Slavin, & Cheung, 2014) and various journalistic sources testify to the spread of this instructional model within Africa, and Southeast Asia. One widely discussed (and often controversial) instantiation of this is the usage of scripted curricula within schools run by the for-profit company Bridge International Academies that runs almost 600 low-cost private schools within Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, Liberia, and India, which are specifically designed to educate poor students within these nations (Anderson, 2018). Bridge schools view scripts as necessary to address teachers' lack of training and frequent absences. The World Bank, which endorses Bridge's approach, published statistics in 2013 that indicate massive disparities between the amount of instructional time that students in public and private schools receive in Kenya where Bridge schools operates, often as a result of teacher absence (Ross, 2014). The technologies and curriculum employed by Bridges attempt to address this gap in instructional time by not only 'maximizing' content exposure through instructional scripts delivered via tablet, but also by tracking teachers on various metrics including arrival time and the exact amount of time that it takes for them to get through various components of the lesson, also via their tablet (Anderson, 2018).

This usage of technology amplifies the monitoring function that scripted curriculum facilitates and intensifies the amount of scrutiny that the teacher finds herself under, further limiting teacher professionalism and the teacher's ability to modify instruction to fit local needs and desires. The teachers employed at Bridge schools in Kenya work an approximately 10 hour day, substantially longer than their colleagues in Kenyan public schools, and only slightly more than 50% of teachers are certified (Tyre, 2017). Furthermore, each day teachers download onto

their tablets lesson plans that have been created half a world away in Cambridge, Massachusetts,[3] which brings a new meaning to MacGillavry et al.'s (2004) claim that the imposition of scripted curricula 'colonizes' teachers' pedagogical practices. Fidelity to the scripts is strictly enforced, with Bridge's teacher evaluations providing a rating for whether the teacher 'reads from the script 100% of the time while instructing' (Anderson, 2018).

Although this single case tells us little about how widespread practices of scripting have become in the international context or how these practices vary by local context, it nonetheless suggests that the practice of scripting lessons has become a part of the international education reform industry, and thus should be carefully monitored by researchers in all countries in order to understand trends and consequences of usage.

Conclusion

We began this analysis under the assumption that public education should be structured to accomplish democratic aims and, as such, the utilization of increasingly popular scripted curricular programs should be critically interrogated in light of these aims. We argued, in the vein of both Dewey and Gutmann, that schools have a duty to advance democratic education both in the form of knowledge necessary for participating in democratic procedures and in the form of cultivating the ability to participate in a democratic way of life. After a charitable consideration of arguments in favor of scripted curriculum, we demonstrated that both the implementation of scripted curriculum and its root design is antidemocratic and impedes the ability of schools to advance democratic values. It replaces trust in and the valuation of the individual with depersonalized, autocratic mechanisms. As we have reached our conclusion, we

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[3] The scripted lesson plans disseminated by another nonprofit active in Pakistan, United We Reach, are also created by teachers in the United States, specifically California.

wish to emphasize what practical implications these findings have for educational policy and practice.

The most important implication is that there is a necessity for a strong, highly skilled teaching workforce, where each individual has the ability to critically evaluate curriculum and carefully construct or modify it to the needs of the general population and individual students that they serve. Rather than administering scripts as a one-size-fits-all remedy for the low achievement of impoverished students, what is needed is a recognition that poverty does exert a strong impact on students' ability to positively interact with and learn from their schooling environment. Even if these curricula are high quality and do result in improved test scores, the rigid structures and narrowing of curricula that they result in create a two-tier instructional system that unjustly disadvantages students who are already economically marginalized. The implication that scripts distort teachers' understanding of equitable instruction—with modification and scaffolding based on student need being replaced by the practice of 'holding everyone to high standards' (Timberlake et al., 2017)—has disturbing implications regarding the education of our most at-risk students.

Furthermore, an education that respects and fosters democratic values necessitates that everyone who has a stake in society must be able to have a say about what it should include. This means that citizens and even students must be able to contribute to the learning process, something that highly scripted curricular materials leave no room for. However, increasing the expertise and intellectual autonomy of teachers, renders curricular flexibility possible even in environments that implement scripted programs, and provides a model of democratic interactions where students have a voice in their learning and are prepared to participate in later civic life. In a society that depends on the participation of its citizens in the continued renewal and betterment

of democratic life, our emphasis should be on increasing the expertise and professional autonomy of our teachers, the engagement of our communities, and the right of our students to participate meaningfully in their education. If we indeed commit ourselves to these values, then clearly scripted curriculum has no place in our schools.

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