

The Journey from Adoption to Implementation of a Middle School ELA Curriculum: An  
Instrumental Case Study

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 2015, Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) was introduced as a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the end of the No Child Left Behind Act (Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.). ESSA continued the requirements that all states adopt or create academic standards that prepared students for post-secondary requirements as measured by high-stakes tests. (Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.). To address the accountability measures set forth by ESSA within these high-stakes tests, many states and districts turned to curriculum companies to provide materials that were already created, vetted, and aligned to rigorous academic standards like those found in the Common Core standards. For states, it was far easier to purchase and utilize already created materials rather than cultivate their own. While having the curriculum already created alleviated some issues, it created tensions between those who select it and those who implement it in classrooms.

It was within these tensions that this study focused. This instrumental case study followed the journey of a literacy curriculum from adoption to implementation in one school district, one middle school, and one ELA classroom. The study explored the perceptions and experiences of educators by looking at the issue of the implementation as the case through the lens of technical and adaptive change approaches, intended and enacted curriculum, and integrity and fidelity of implementation. Through the use of dramaturgical coding, it was found that there were issues within the objectives, conflicts, and tactics for the district, the administrators, and the teacher. Their objectives had overlap but were not completely aligned so the outcomes for adoption

and implementation were different. Furthermore, the three different dichotomies found in the conceptual framework often worked in opposition to one another as opposed to having these areas work together

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## LIST OF TERMS/ABBREVIATIONS

*Adaptive Change*- change that requires new learning surrounding curriculum implementation and is not easily solvable; those changes to mindsets and habits that are embedded within the teacher's practices and beliefs; "the solution resides with the followers, not the leader or expert" (Heifetz et al., 2009)

*Attained Curriculum*- knowledge, understanding, skills, etc. that students acquire as a result of instruction (Kurtz et al., 2010)

*Change Process*- a progression of behavior through motivation and understanding to make change permanent (Fullan, 2007)

*Curriculum*- the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn, which includes the learning standards or learning objectives they are expected to meet, the units and lessons that the teachers teach; the assignments and projects given to students; the books, materials, videos, presentations, and readings used in a course, and the tests, assessments, and other methods used to evaluate student learning (Hass, 1980; Glossary of Educational Reform)

*Enacted Curriculum*- what the curriculum looks like in practice, specifically how teachers bring the selected curriculum to life in their classroom (Kurtz et al., 2010)

*Fidelity of Implementation*- refers to how closely prescribed practices are followed by teachers regarding the use of the intended curriculum (Penuel, Phillips, & Harris, 2014)

*Implementation*- the process of putting a decision or plan into effect; the application of the curriculum in the classroom (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992)

*Integrity of implementation*- refers to how closely the teacher adheres to the guideline

teachers' adjustments of the materials in relation to the curricular goals and principles undergirding the structures of curriculum teachers adhere to guidance embedded in curriculum materials (LeMahieu, 2011)

*Intended Curriculum*- the ELA curriculum adopted by the district; system-wide official curriculum; the prescribed practices mandated by the district, school leadership, and/or curriculum developers (Kurtz et al., 2010)

*Technical Change*- change that requires little new learning surrounding the curriculum; these are often changes to schedules, personnel, supplies, the curriculum itself; it is easily solvable (Heifetz et al., 2009)

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

In 2001, the United States Senate and the House of Representatives were faced with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Kysilka, 2003). The act, known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, was intended to ensure that all students, regardless of race, creed, color, or social status, had access to and received a fair and equal high-quality education. The goal of NCLB was to lower the achievement gap in public schools in the United States, required each state to develop measurable goals to improve student academic performance, and have all students proficient in all core subject areas by the end of each academic year (Brown, 2013). It also tied the learning of specific content areas to high-stakes tests, which were linked to federal dollars. If results on high stakes tests were deemed inadequate, negative consequences were placed on districts and schools. As the consequences from these high-stakes tests increased, many companies began to create and package curriculum that promised to support learning for all students and close gaps in learning as measured by high-stakes tests.

In 2015, Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) was introduced as a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the end of the No Child Left Behind Act (Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.). ESSA continued the requirements that all states adopt or create academic standards that prepared students for post-secondary requirements as measured by high-stakes tests. (Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.). Further, ESSA did not eliminate periodic standardized testing but modified this

requirement and reduced the amount of high-stakes testing administered to students (Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.). Under ESSA, each state had the ability to craft a plan that addressed the needs of their children. Essentially, ESSA put the power of how to meet federal requirements back into the hands of state and local public education entities.

While much of the power went back to the states and public-school systems, the United States Department of Education still had requirements that had to be met. States and districts still had to adhere to rigorous academic standards that required all students be able to access high-quality curriculum in order to make adequate academic progress (USDOE, n.d.). Within that requirement, ESSA authorized and urged states and school systems to develop and adopt innovative approaches to make academic progress. Schools were held accountable for ensuring that the innovative approaches each adopted addressed the academic performance of all students and student subgroups (Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.). Thus, because of ESSA, states scrambled to meet the mandates of increased rigor in academic standards and improvements in student performance on high-stakes standardized tests (Wheat, 2015).

In an effort to address the accountability measures set forth by ESSA, many states and districts turned to curriculum companies to provide materials that were already created, vetted, and aligned to rigorous academic standards like those found in the Common Core standards. For states, it far easier to purchase and utilize already created materials rather than cultivate their own. Moreover, despite the repeal found in ESSA that states no longer had to adopt Common Core standards, many states still based their own

state standards on the concepts found within Common Core which made these aligned materials all the more appealing (Every Student Succeeds Act, n.d.).

State school boards began to revise their textbook adoption directives and cultivate lists of curriculum vendors that districts and schools could choose from. Further, states also began to hold districts and schools accountable for the use of these curricular materials believing that fidelity of usage would increase student learning and improve students' test scores (Nicholson, Bauer, & Wolley, 2016).

### **Context**

Tennessee was not immune to these pressures and, in 2019, embarked upon its own curriculum adoption and implementation for literacy materials. The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) curriculum committee created an approved list of literacy curricula that districts could choose from, with a waiver process for those materials that were not on the list. Seventeen curriculums were placed on the TDOE list for districts to choose from. The TDOE provided guidance for districts to create a curriculum review committee composed of teachers, administration, and parents of children currently enrolled in school (Information for Districts, n.d.). It was the task of the curriculum adoption committee in each district to review materials and make recommendations based on the needs of students (Information for Districts, n.d.). After selection, approval from the local school board was garnered and the district would then begin purchasing materials (Information for Districts, n.d.). Apart from requiring districts to use the materials they select or face a monetary fine, it is up to local districts and schools to determine a plan for implementation; however, because TDOE put some

stringent mandates in place to ensure that districts are using the materials they adopt, many districts assumed a stance of fidelity of usage.

Conway County School District began its plan for adoption in late 2019 based on the TDOE adoption recommendations. Conway County's Instructional Department met together to determine a timeline for adoption, board approval, and purchase. The hope was that much of this process would be completed by March or April of 2020, so that teacher training could get underway, and teachers would be ready for implementation at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. The Instructional Department asked principals to nominate teachers to serve on the adoption committee and the district selected some principals, assistant principals, and other instructional leaders to also serve on the committee. Behind the scenes the district was working on the implementation plan for using the materials. It included a vision for learning and professional development, along with monthly walkthroughs that district personnel would go one to monitor implementation and the fidelity of usage. Subsequent chapters will more closely address these areas.

Many states and school districts have similar systems in place for adoption and implementation; however, districts often unintentionally create systems that generate tensions between those who decide on the selected curriculum and those doing the actual implementation. Some of these tensions stem from what Polikoff (2018) refers to as barriers of implementation: determining which materials are high-quality materials, getting schools and districts to adopt those materials, and getting teachers to use those materials with fidelity. Fidelity has been defined as what is specifically described and

prescribed in the guidelines or manuals of the curriculum (LaMahieu, 2011). As curriculum is adopted, the inclination from the state and often districts are to maintain fidelity, rather than supporting teachers as they make sense of and adapt given materials while maintaining the integrity of the implementation. Integrity has been defined as doing what matters most within the curriculum in regard to student learning while also accommodating needs, context, and circumstance (LaMahieu, 2011).

While the mandates surrounding the adoption of curriculum cannot be changed, supporting teachers' understanding of the purpose of the materials they have been tasked to use in order to ensure integrity of implementation can be addressed (American Institute for Research [AIR], 2016). According to Lochner, Conrad, and Graham (2015), teachers are central to whether a curriculum is delivered consistently, effectively, and with efficacy. Without a thoughtful implementation process, curriculum becomes as Mahan (1972) states, "Misused, abused, and unused curricula skeletons in the closets of most school(s)" (p. 159).

### **Statement of the Problem**

In effort to not waste precious resources (money and time), create positive outcomes for students, and ensure that adopted curricular materials are not "unused curricula skeletons in the closets of schools", districts and schools must create a thoughtful implementation process (Mahan, 1972, p. 159). Research has found the actual implementation of curriculum used in classrooms differs from teacher to teacher (Marzano, 2003). Further, tensions between old and new practices and the dynamics of change as a process are at the heart of curriculum implementation. Additionally, as



districts and schools are tasked with adopting curricular materials, consideration must be given on how best to support the teachers' implementation through learning, coaching, and supervision (Bryk et al., 2010). Which in turn means that teachers must consider how they are "making major adjustments to the content they teach and the rigor by which they teach" (Supovitz, 2015, p. 8).

Addressing the underlying issues of these tensions and dynamics along with the major adjustments embedded within implementation will lead to insights into how leadership, at both the district and school level, can more effectively guide and support curriculum implementation at the teacher level. Specifically, how districts and schools might address technical changes and adaptive changes as they relate to integrity of implementation is needed. Technical changes are those changes that are easy to make, like schedule changes, faculty changes and providing access to a curriculum (Heifetz et al., 2009). In contrast, adaptive changes are those changes that are more difficult to make like teacher mindsets and beliefs, as it relates to the integrity of implementation (Heifetz et al., 2009). Paramount to effective support and implementation is identifying and understanding technical and adaptive change as a process and the iterations of those changes between those who are responsible for the decision to adopt a curriculum and the teachers tasked with changing their own practices through implementation of curriculum adopted.

This is not to say that technical and adaptive change sit in opposition to one another, but rather work in concert to change both habits and mindsets about the teaching practices necessary to implement a curriculum. Equally important to the ways that

curriculum change is implemented is an examination of both the intended and enacted curriculum. Intended curriculum is the envisioned use by the curriculum writers, district, and school leaders (Kurtz et al., 2010). Enacted curriculum is how the teachers interpret the intended curriculum and use it in their classroom (Kurtz et al., 2010). Dependent upon how technical and adaptive changes are approached can determine whether the intended and enacted curriculum are complimentary or competing with one another. It is the process of technical and adaptive change that intersects with the intended and enacted curriculum at the classroom level that coalesce to form the conceptual framework in this study.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to follow the journey of a curriculum from adoption to implementation in one school district middle school, and ELA classroom. Within this journey, study the experiences educators had regarding the adoption and implementation of the curriculum, and if those experiences may have affected their perceptions regarding the intended and enacted curriculum. Further, if those experiences were at all influenced by the use of technical and adaptive change approaches. The intention of this study is not to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum itself, but to explore perceptions regarding the implementation of the curriculum to determine best practices for districts and schools to employ during implementation of their chosen curriculum. This study does not aim to set forth a one size fits all approach to implementation, but rather help districts create a sound understanding of the implementation process through technical and adaptive change lenses to measure the impact of the intended and enacted curriculum.

## **Significance of Study**

Curriculum implementation is carried out in districts and schools that already have intense environments with levels of high pressure to show improved student achievement (Mette & Scribner, 2014). Further, teachers often complain of the constant “swing of the pendulum” in curriculum implementation (Baresic & Gilman, 2001, p. 5). Traub, Weiss, Fisher and Musella (1972) maintain that education is "littered with the remains of programmatic innovations that have ... all but disappeared" (p. 69). Fullan (1977) acknowledges that there is little focus on what happens between the decision to adopt an innovation and intended outcomes. Because of this lack of focus after adoption, when the time for implementation arrives, teachers often turn to the internet or other sources to supplement what they feel is lacking in the curriculum, which may lead to the banishing of district/school mandated materials to the back of their closets.

Furthermore, while the curriculum response to state and federal reform mandates have been studied for over two decades (Lyons & Algozzine, 2006), a sustainable implementation process for literacy curriculum innovations at the district and school level has received little attention because factors in these studies tend to rely on reported use rather than actual use (Odom et al., 2010). Thus, the processes of implementation, including how and why teachers use curriculum the way that they do, has not been fully addressed. Because school districts, school administrators, and teachers are facing increasingly difficult external pressures to change, it is paramount to understand why curriculum reforms fail to have long-lasting impacts on student achievement and what

resources and processes can be utilized more effectively to have a positive impact on student performance.

Fullan (1975) refers to the need to address long-lasting change when he states that "the implementation process has not been seriously addressed as a problem either by researchers or by practitioners of change"(p. 17). Trujillo (2013) echoes this fact by stating

district and school leadership strategies tend exclusively toward technical approaches to change, which have limited impact on issues that require adaptive attention. Curriculum implementation requires a blend of technical and adaptive approaches that come from complex curricular reform efforts. (p.538)

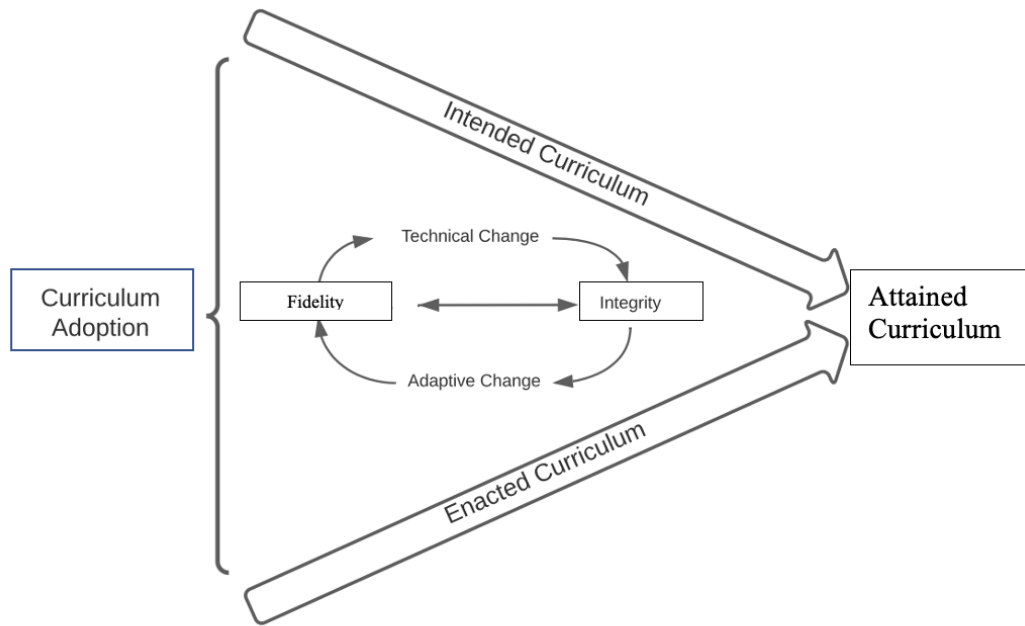
Because of this, districts and schools offer a unique opportunity to study the change process through the implementation of curriculum, as it is an attempt to change district, school leadership, and teacher behaviors and practices.

The significance of this study is to extend and expand upon the research regarding curriculum implementation and the technical and adaptive change process necessary to ensure that the implementation is effective. This study will help provide insight for districts, schools, and educators approaching technical and adaptive change to guide both the intended and enacted curriculum implementation outcomes. As districts and school leadership often turn to compliance-driven fidelity checks typically pushed through with technical change tactics, these tactics almost always lead to unintended adaptive change consequences (Heifetz et al., 2009). Leaving teachers with little opportunity to understand why the decisions were made and how to make sense of what to do next.

## **Conceptual Framework**

Much of the research that focuses on curriculum and curriculum implementation focuses on the various aspects described above in isolation. For example, change processes, such as technical and adaptive, are focused on when discussing how to get teachers to use the curriculum (Heifetz et al., 2009), but then stops short of explaining of what curriculum looks like in use. The intended and enacted curriculum is examined in studies that look at what happens after implementation (Kurtz et al., 2010), but not the process to arrive at either. Similarly, studies examine the fidelity of implementation by looking at how closely aligned the practices of the teacher are to the prescribed practices found in the curriculum (Penuel, Phillips & Harris, 2014). While each of these studies is important, this study is distinct as it combines these three areas to strengthen curriculum implementation. By looking at the technical and adaptive changes employed by one district and school to explore possible discrepancies between the intended and enacted curriculum, and how those changes and possible discrepancies influenced teachers' actions to implement the curriculum with either fidelity or integrity.

Figure 1 below illustrates how these aspects come together to support a whole structure for implementation.

**Figure 1***Curriculum Implementation Process***Research Questions**

Therefore, the research questions are:

1. What does the journey from curriculum adoption to implementation look like for one district, middle school, and ELA classroom?
2. How did educators' experiences of the adoption and implementation approach shape their perceptions and experiences of the intended and enacted curriculum implementation?

These questions aim to understand how leadership, at both the district and school level, can effectively guide and support curriculum implementation at the teacher level. Further the investigation of these questions sought to understand the underlying issues involved

with technical and adaptive change approaches and how those issues can affect perceptions and experiences.

### **Research Design**

The methodology chosen for this research was qualitative, specifically an instrumental case study. An instrumental case study demands a focus on the *issue* as the case. In this research, the issue was the implementation of curriculum; it is the understanding of this issue that creates the boundaries of where we start and end (Stake, 2005). This study focused on the specific journey from adoption to implementation by one district, one middle school, and one classroom as they entered their second year of curriculum implementation, specifically looking at their implementation through the lenses of technical and adaptive change and to what degree each of the two were employed to address possible variations between the intended and enacted curriculum. Further, I sought to understand what effect the use of each had on closing possible variations, what may have accounted for those variations, and if those variations actually mattered. My data points derived from interviews with a district leader, school administrators, and teacher as well artifacts that supported this implementation.

### **Summary**

This chapter began by discussing the current state of education under ESSA, and how the mandates under ESSA have created a need for schools to adopt high-quality curricular materials. An introduction to the problem and the background of the study was presented to create context and show a need for this research. The conceptual framework was presented to look at the major areas within curriculum implementation: change

processes, intended and enacted curriculum, and integrity versus fidelity of implementation. This framework leads into the purpose of the study and the avenue by which I answered the research questions: What does the journey from curriculum adoption to implementation look like for one district, middle school, and ELA classroom?, and how did educators' experiences of the adoption and implementation approach shape their perceptions and experiences of the intended and enacted curriculum implementation?



## **Chapter II: Review of Literature**

The review of literature will begin with a brief historical overview of curriculum and discuss curriculum implementation as a construct. The next sections will review the literature regarding the role of technical and adaptive change, fidelity and integrity of implementation, and the intended and enacted curriculum. These bodies of knowledge, the role of technical and adaptive change, fidelity and integrity of implementation, and the intended and enacted curriculum, converge to form the conceptual framework for this study. Chapter two concludes with a discussion of this conceptual framework in regards to the process of enacting change as curriculum moves from adoption to implementation.

### **Historical Overview of Curriculum**

Prior to 1900, curriculum was described in terms of subjects, time allotted to these subjects, and when in years students would take these subjects (Kelting-Gibson, 2013). Curriculum as a discipline began around 1918 with a shift in focus from what and when subjects would be taught to the intentional development of a plan to teach a predetermined body of knowledge (Varbelow, 2015). As a discipline, curriculum is categorized by three historical periods: curriculum development (1918 – 1969); the reconceptualization of curriculum as a field (1970s); and contemporary curriculum theory (1980s to present) (Varbelow, 2015).

Curriculum development began in 1918 when John Franklin Bobbit, an American educationalist, published the first curriculum book called, “The Curriculum,” which contained knowledge for developing curriculum for the general education of all students. His stance towards curriculum was based on Frederick Winslow Taylor’s work regarding

American industry. Taylor's work focused on making industry more efficient (Varbelow, 2015). Bobbit adapted the efficiency model to education and called for curriculum development to develop objectives that are: (1) for all students, not just a few, (2) important for adult living and success, (3) practical, (4) aligned with community needs, (5) chosen with the involvement of the community, and (6) supported by criteria for success (Kelting-Gibson, 2013).

The reconceptualization of curriculum was a shift from developing curriculum to understanding it (Varbelow, 2015). Coinciding with this shift was the work of Jerome Bruner, a cognitive psychologist who posited that learning was an active process where learners construct new ideas based on previous knowledge (Bruner, 1960). During this period, the focus shifted from developing curricula to understanding curriculum influences on all those, teachers, students, researchers, who experience it (Varbelow, 2015). This shift influenced much of what we see in the field of curriculum and learning today (Varbelow, 2015).

Contemporary curriculum theory began in the 1980s. Much of the instructional models used in classrooms today began during this time. The Hunter Direct Instruction Model, which focuses on motivational teaching and learning, and Bloom's Taxonomy, which consists of using a variety of activities related to the same content to assess students' understanding are few of the practices that were introduced during this period (Steward, Martin, Burns & Bush, 2010; Kelting-Gibson, 2013).

## **Curriculum Implementation as a Construct**

Just as there are varying definitions of curriculum implementation, the same can be said when trying to define curriculum. Goodlad & Klein (1967) refer to curriculum in terms involving planned learning systems that create noticeable changes for the learners. Hass (1980) refers to curriculum as the experiences that individual learners have in a program of education. The purpose of these experiences is to achieve broad goals and specific objectives, which is planned in terms of a framework of theory and research. Similarly, the *Glossary of Education Reform* (2015) refers to it as

the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn, which includes the learning standards or learning objectives they are expected to meet, the assignments and projects given to students; the books, materials, videos, presentations, and readings used in a course, and the tests, assessments and other methods used to evaluate student learning. (Curriculum, 2015)

Further definitions of curriculum simply refer to it as everything the teacher actually teaches to students. Curriculum as a construct has been defined in terms of materials, student interaction with said materials, and finally teacher implementation of those materials.

Curriculum implementation definitions are varying and oftentimes conflicting. For example, Beauchamp's (1975) definition of implementation is "a point of departure for teaching ... and ... represent(s) the merger of the curriculum system with the instructional system" (p. 164). Tyler (1975), on the other hand, defines implementation through the utilization of a curriculum plan. Both Beauchamp (1975) and Tyler (1975)

concentrate on the idea of teacher interpretation of curriculum. Similarly, Fullan and Pomfret (1977) define implementation through activities assuming the nature of predefined, complex social systems. These four researchers consider implementation as an action and the means by which curriculum is enacted. Furthering this idea, Paul (1976) translates implementation as a cognitive process whereby potential adopters are made aware of the curriculum, and Wang (2010) defines implementing curriculum as “teachers’ activities toward achieving overall goals specified in the teaching syllabus” (p.137). For the purposes of this study, curriculum implementation will be the process by which the teacher makes meaning of the materials given to use and adjusts those materials based on classroom context, the needs of the student, and experience, regardless of the original intent of the curriculum developers.

Leithwood and Russell (1973) stated that a "disproportionate amount of educational research and development resources has been and is presently being allocated exclusively to product development rather than to the implementation process" (p. 10). Similarly, in 1992, Snyder, Bolin, and Zumwalt argued that there is much discussion surrounding curriculum, but there is very little research regarding its implementation. A limited number of studies have attempted to define implementation due to its complex nature. Because educators are the main players in implementation, their implementation or interpretation of implementation is important to understand in order to fully test the effects of the curriculum. Fullan (1978) stated that "what happens during implementation can make or break even carefully planned and generally accepted projects [curriculum adoptions]" (p. 8). The issue being that too few schools have been able "to surmount the

barriers of implementation which constitutes a perplexing challenge" concluded Beauchamp (1975, p. 8). Much of these insurmountable barriers, appear to be caused by the lack of seriousness given to the issues surrounding implementation. Additionally, educational leaders and teachers have largely been in the dark about curriculum implementation literature. Mainly because there is limited research that encompasses the following at the same time: teacher enactment of curriculum, the effects of student achievement stemming from the implementation, and the professional development used in preparation and support of the implementation. Therefore, it is important to consider all aspects implementation, from curriculum adoption to the enactment of the curriculum.

### **Technical and Adaptive Change**

“We have become so accustomed to the presence of change that we rarely stop to think what change really means as we are experiencing it at the personal level. The crux of change is how individuals come to grips with (the) reality” (Fullan, 2001, p. 29). He recognizes that change is ever-present, and that change is a process, not an event. In the context of curriculum implementation, concern with the change process emerged as evidence showed that most innovations failed to change or improve the status quo of educational practice as expected (Fullan, 2001). Patterson and Czajkowski (1979) noted, “We make our way through the initiation, development, and adoption phases of curriculum change, but then we do not take steps necessary to achieve a satisfactory level of implementation. Our innovations do not enter the classroom; they do not affect day-to-day interactions between teachers and students” (p. 204).

As noted previously, there is a gap between the intended and enacted curriculum, therefore the concept of change must be taken into account due to the ways that curriculum implementation is conceptualized. The steps taken by an educational department, district and/or school to change pre-existing practices should also be considered in order to understand the implementation. Steller (1983) notes that careful planning is required for success in education. Furthermore, as Huberman and Miles (1984) stated, “Teachers as implementers have different knowledge, values, beliefs, and theories of action, all of which, implicitly and explicitly, influence “actual use” of certain features of a package of innovations. That is, depending upon different interpretations of the original intents of developers, change takes place differently” (p. 130). Districts and schools have an opportunity to shape the ways that change is used, specifically those categorized as technical or adaptive.

In *Leadership on the Line*, Heifetz and Linsky (2017) describe change in two ways: technical or adaptive. Technical changes, sometimes known as first-order change, are those that are easy to identify and lend themselves to quick concrete solutions. They are generally an extension of the past, consistent with prevailing values and norms, and implemented with existing knowledge and skills (Heifetz et al., 2009). People are generally receptive and willing to implement these changes.

Adaptive changes, also known as second-order changes, are complex and ambiguous. Solutions to this type of change usually require people to learn new ways of doing things, change their attitudes, values and norms, and adopt an experimental mind-

set. These changes require systems thinking to understand the wide array of players, pieces, and approaches to fully encompass the facets and challenges of this change.

The adoption of the curriculum itself can be seen as the technical change. It is concrete and generally teachers and schools are willing to “try” it. At face value it can be seen as the solution to X: low rigor, underperforming students, inconsistent teaching practices, etc. The larger problem, though, is that curriculum implementation is perceived as technical change thus causing adaptive change issues. Adaptive change requires leaders and stakeholders to experiment with new procedures, norms, or beliefs to address problems of practice with unknown solutions.

While these technical change approaches are necessary to consider, they have limited impact on the adaptive change required to fully change teaching practices for sustainable student achievement. With adoption of any curriculum, district and school leaders are faced with the task of supporting teachers’ implementation of these materials through learning, coaching, and supervision (Bryk et al., 2010); however, these tasks are often approached with the use of technical strategies and often result in unintended adaptive challenges, which might have been diminished had they been approached adaptively from the beginning (Heifetz, et al., 2009). Other challenges to misunderstandings of the standards, mixed messaging, and lack of PD time to calibrate implementation. Curriculum implementation requires a blend of technical and adaptive approaches that come with learning to lead complex changes. Further, by intertwining two of the distinct classifications of Kurtz, et.al. (2010) the intended or official curriculum and the enacted curriculum with technical and adaptive change, a model for

understanding how curriculum moves from inception to adoption to implementation emerges.

Even though Heifetz et al.'s model of technical and adaptive change was originally developed in the field of business, this model is "a more intricate understanding of the dynamics at work when new programs or practices or new organizational arrangements are brought into schools or designed there" (Huberman, 1992, p. 2). I gave preference to this model for that specific reason.

### **Fidelity and Integrity**

The term fidelity has been used in the field of implementation when describing the extent to which the actual use of the innovation "corresponds to intended or planned use" (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977, p. 340). Most of the literature regarding curriculum implementation has to do with fidelity of the implementation rather than clearly and measurably defining the curriculum implementation. Under fidelity of implementation, users are advised to follow the prescribed steps as listed within the curriculum, making few changes, and doing exactly what it says to do. Essentially, fidelity involves the use of tools and procedures to ensure that users of the curriculum "replicate programs exactly as they were designed and intended" (LaMahieu, 2011). Fidelity of implementation is often used in an effort to prevent teacher variables from affecting the curriculum-in-use (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). While fidelity of implementation is typically employed with the best of intentions, teachers are reduced to a passive role and are not able to apply context and student knowledge to instruction to make learning meaningful. Furthermore, LaMahieu (2011) points out that "our sense of "what works" does not measure anything



that actually happened anywhere. Neither does it represent a measure of impact that is likely to be realized in any subsequent implementation.”

Ben-Peretz (1990) expressed that creating conditions for fidelity of implementation are inappropriate to the role of the teacher. He then goes on to state that “There is no one predetermined set of goals for a set of curriculum materials, but rather an array of possible goals depending on how the teacher interprets and uses the potential curriculum materials” (p.57). This idea more closely aligns with integrity of implementation, a pursuit that asks teachers to account for classroom and student context and teacher experience. Integrity of implementation centers more around the students’ learning than the delivery of the materials.

Further, connections can be drawn between the intended curriculum and fidelity of implementation and between the enacted curriculum and integrity of implementation. The role of the teacher differs depending on which two are being examined. While fidelity of implementation seeks to quantify the extent to which the teachers’ use the curriculum through measurable objectives by an outside observer (Penuel, Phillips, & Harris, 2014). Integrity of implementation places the teacher more centrally as an “integral part of the curriculum constructed and enacted in the classroom” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 363).

### **Intended and Enacted Curriculum**

Fullan (2001) noted that change programs do little to take into account subjective realities of teachers experiencing many problems explicitly drawn from their own daily curricula and teaching practices. With the basic problem of educational change existing

in the gap between plans and reality (MacDonald & Walker, 1976). This gap exists between the intended and enacted curriculum. Kurtz, et.al. (2010) classifies curriculum and its implementation in three discrete ways: the intended curriculum referring to a system-wide official curriculum, such as academic standards; the enacted curriculum referring to how teachers bring that content to life in their classroom; the attained curriculum refers to the understanding students actually gain during a lesson. This study will focus on the intended and enacted curriculum. The intended curriculum can be thought of as the official curriculum or the “governing agencies [that] authorize expectations for student learning or performance and, in some cases, the instructional or curricular resources, and pathways for learning to be employed” (Remillard & Heck, 2014, p. 708). This study will define the intended the curriculum as the prescribed practices mandated by the curriculum writers, district and/or school leadership, and is closely aligned with fidelity of implementation. Essentially is what is intended to be taught and followed when using the curriculum.

Conversely, the enacted curriculum is what actually happens in practice in the teacher’s classroom and is closely aligned with integrity of implementation. Remillard and Heck (2014) write specifically about what it means for teachers to enact the curriculum. They relate the enacted curriculum to the intended curriculum which “encompasses what actually occurs in practice through the enactment process...includes the teacher-intended curriculum, the curriculum that is actually enacted with students, and student outcomes” (Remillard & Heck, 2014, p. 708). Additionally, some researchers have noted that there is a gap between the intended and enacted curriculum, that being

how designers or leaders intend for teachers to use the materials during instruction, and what teachers in fact do (Brown & Campione, 1996).

For this study the possible discrepancies between the intended and enacted curriculum will be explored by analyzing the district and school's use of technical and adaptive change processes, and how those change processes influenced the teachers' comfortability to implement with either fidelity or integrity.

### **Summary**

This review discussed the literature that informed the development of this study. It began with a brief history of curriculum to situate the phenomenon with the context of curriculum adoption and implementation today. A summary of definitions used to describe curriculum and curriculum implementation laid the foundation for understanding the complexity of, and distinction between, components of the technical and adaptive change process. Finally, a focus on the nuances of fidelity and integrity of curriculum use by teachers further illuminates the complexity of curriculum as an innovative change. These constructs, technical and adaptive change, fidelity and integrity, interact and determine if the intended and enacted curriculum are one and the same. The next chapter will outline and explain the methods and procedures used for this inquiry. I will explain why I chose to conduct a qualitative inquiry and I will list the procedures I used for collecting data. Finally, I will share details about the setting of the case study, including details about the district, school, administrators, instruction leaders and teachers involved in the adoption to implementation processes.

### **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to follow the journey of a curriculum from adoption to implementation in one school district middle school, and ELA classroom. Within this journey, study the experiences educators had regarding the adoption and implementation of the curriculum, and if those experiences may have affected their perceptions regarding the intended and enacted curriculum. Further, if those experiences were at all influenced by the use of technical and adaptive change approaches.

In this chapter, I explain why a qualitative research design was the best choice for this study. I discuss the rationale for this study, the research design, and methodological approach. I also discuss the participant selection, research site, methods for data collection and analysis, and methods to ensure the credibility of the study.

#### **Restatement of the Problem and Research Questions**

Districts and schools are tasked with adopting curricular materials each year from the state adoption list. Addressing the implementation process in a thoughtful manner can alleviate issues for teachers and administrators struggling between the tensions of old and new practices. While teachers must consider how they are “making major adjustments to the content they teach and the rigor by which they teach,” it is up to all educators within a district and to support teachers with the implementation of the curriculum that they are enacting (Supovitz, 2015, p. 8). It is in the ideas of that support that guided the research questions of this study:

1. What does the journey from curriculum adoption to implementation look like for one district, middle school, and ELA classroom?

2. How did educators' experiences of the adoption and implementation approach shape their perceptions and experiences of the intended and enacted curriculum implementation?

These questions sought to understand the underlying issues of the dynamics and the major adjustments embedded within implementation and how teachers approached it. Further these questions aim to understand how leadership, at both the district and school level, can effectively guide and support curriculum implementation at the teacher level.

As a qualitative study, my experiences with curriculum adoption and implementation are important to include to make explicit the understandings I hold regarding the phenomenon in this study. With this in mind, I share my subjectivity statement prior to explaining the research design, participant and site selection, data collection and analysis and trustworthiness of this study.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

For the past five years, I have worked for the priority office in my district. This office focuses on schools that perform in the bottom five percent for student achievement in the state. To boost student achievement, we are allowed to approach teaching and learning in innovative ways and are not always required to adhere to mandates from the district. One such area is curriculum. We were able to implement our own structured curriculum with the twelve secondary schools in priority. This work was the hardest of my career as an educator. Part of the challenge was my lack of knowledge surrounding change management and curriculum implementation. I approached the work with many assumptions about the ways in which people deal with change. For instance, when

conducting professional development in a school who would be implementing the curriculum, I told them about the curriculum, modeled lesson structures, and gave them strategies to use in their classrooms. Essentially, I provided technical change solutions. What I failed to account for was adaptive change problems. The teachers did not understand why they were being given a “prescribed” curriculum. They believed their own autonomy was gone and they would not have to teach from a script. I had failed to approach this work, first, by adjusting mindsets. I assumed that teachers and principals would willingly change their practices to do what I, a district specialist, was telling them to do. I thought that I was thorough and specific in what needed to change. What I did not realize is that I was approaching curriculum implementation in a purely technical change, compliance driven way. Once I began researching implementation and change management, I was able to create phases of learning for the teachers and principals that aligned more to adaptive change. These phases of learning included “quick-wins”, such as a fluency protocol and a looking at student work where teachers could see specific changes quickly and I could gauge who was willing and ready to move to the next phase, and who need more adaptive change work.

Specifically, in my own experiences, I have witnessed and taken part in top-down, compliance driven approaches to curriculum implementation that have created larger adaptive change challenges. The push being to adhere as closely as possible to the intended curriculum. While this in itself is not an issue, the tactics used were and the implementation fell apart. It is in these experiences that I must remain mindful to not

project my own experiences or beliefs onto the participants, within my interview questions, or my interpretations of the findings of this study.

### **Instrumental Case Study Design**

According to Creswell (2007), a case study is an exploration of phenomena within a “bounded system,” bounded by place and time with detailed, in-depth analysis of multiple sources “rich in context” (p. 75). Merriam indicated (1998) that case study is flexible because it includes any and all methods of data collection for the researcher to acquire rich information from the case. Specifically, an instrumental case study demands a focus on the *issue* as the case (Stake, 2005). Furthermore, an instrumental case study is a bounded case used to understand something, such as the curriculum implementation process, and seeks particular rather than a general understanding obtained through multiple cases (Creswell, 2013). An instrumental case study also seeks to understand the how and why of a particular phenomenon (Stake, 1995). This case study explored the ways in which a district implemented the curriculum by understanding experiences and perceptions. The case was further bound by time, which was after the formal adoption and during implementation. The phenomena happened in a specified place, one school district and more specifically one school and classroom in that district. In this way the phenomenon is as Hatch (2002) states “a special kind of qualitative work that investigates a contextualized contemporary phenomenon within specified boundaries” (p. 30). The phenomenon was looking at a school district in Tennessee that had adopted a curriculum from the Tennessee Department of Education’s approved list in general, and a school that was supporting teacher use of the curriculum.

In this research, the issue was the experiences and perceptions surrounding adoption and implementation of curriculum; it is the understanding of this issue that creates the boundaries of where we start and end (Stake, 2005)

Eisner (1998) notes six elements that are indicative of a qualitative study. These six elements are concerned with utilizing (a) a field focused study, (b) the self as an instrument, (c) interpretive character, (d) expressive language, (e) attention to particulars and (f) coherence, insight and instrumental utility (pp. 32-39). Furthermore, Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research design as the:

... inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

Both definitions capture the purpose and aim of this study by noting the need for coherence, the complexity of a problem in context, the importance of participants' words, and the researcher at the heart of this work.

Qualitative research is a process for understanding social phenomenon and as Stake (1995) states "qualitative researchers have pressed for understanding the complex interrelationships among all that exists" (p. 37). Qualitative research is appropriate because this research is exploring the complex nature of change and the interrelationships between the intentions and actions of district, school, and teachers in relationship to the implementation of an adopted curriculum. By applying qualitative research methods, I gathered and analyzed the approaches and understandings of the implementation process



while also determining to what extent each change approach (technical and adaptive) shaped the integrity of enactment by the classroom teacher.

This research study is grounded by Social Constructivism as the theoretical perspective. Social constructivism positions people as both creators and products of social life (Krauss, 2005). Furthermore, this perspective positions social problems not in terms of objective conditions but rather in terms of societal members' collective definitions (Krauss 2005). He also expands upon this perspective by stating “there are multiple realities constructed by human beings who experience a phenomenon of interest” (761). For the district leaders, school administrators, and teachers in Conway County, curriculum implementation is an experience that holds multiple realities depending on the group of participants I examined. Moreover, the implementation of the literacy curriculum demanded changes in how the district, administrators, and teachers approached instruction. Schram (2006) noted that “you cannot develop an understanding of a phenomena apart from understanding people’s experiences of or with that phenomenon” (p. 99). Part of my intentions for this study was to develop an understanding of the experiences and perspectives each group had while undertaking the implementation. Furthermore, constructivism insists that learners create their own definitions, meaning, and understanding. Conway County district participants created their own understanding of the curriculum implementation based on the use of technical and adaptive change.

### **Research Site and Participant Selection**

Purposeful selection was utilized for both the participants and the sites.

According to Marshall (1996), “Qualitative researchers recognize that some informants are ‘richer’ than others and that these people are more likely to provide insight and understanding to the researcher” (p.523). Patton (2002) also attest to the “logic and power of purposeful sampling... Information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling” (p.230). Determining a district in Tennessee that was actively implementing a curriculum from the state adoption list, and a school within that district that was actively supporting teachers, helped create an information-rich case. Conway County was the selected district. It is a medium-sized school district that has 21 schools, nearly 1400 staff members, and approximately 14,000 students. Apart from its demographics, it met the criteria necessary to conduct this study.

Considering the parameters of a case study helped determine the participants and the school-specific site for study. Van manen (1990) states that “although human beings respond differently to the same event, there would exist the certain essential structure of experience, regardless of different background, beliefs, value, and knowledge” (p. 31). Conway County School District and Walker Middle School served as information rich settings to learn more about curriculum implementation and provided that “essential structure of experience” mentioned before (van manen, 1990, p. 31). Because the district was in their second year of implementation, Conway County and Walker Middle School had an abundance of experiences to share regarding their implementation journey.

Conway County School District was selected as they were already implementing a literacy curriculum from the Tennessee State Department of Education curriculum list.

Within the Conway County School district, one district director, Dr. Mary Brown was interviewed because she was directly overseeing the district instructional team responsible for making decisions regarding curriculum and implementation. From there, Dr. Brown provided the recommendation for the specific school that participated in this study. Walker Middle School was selected because it was in its second year of curriculum implementation. The executive principal, Dr. Susan Cates, and assistant principal, Thomas Leeds, were selected due to their direct support with implementation along with their involvement on both the district's curriculum adoption and implementation teams. The teacher, Pam Matthews, was recommended by the principal because she offered a unique perspective on implementation due to her previous experiences with similar curriculums in other school districts. Thus, the site and participants were selected because of their direct knowledge and participation in curriculum implementation. Below is a chart outlining the participants of this study.

**Table 1**

*Participant Overview*

Name	Current Role/Years	Other Roles/Years
Dr. Mary Brown	Director of Curriculum and Instruction- 3 years	High School Principal- N/A
Dr. Susan Cates	Executive Principal- 10 months	Coordinator of School Improvement- 10 years
Mr. Thomas Leeds	Assistant Principal- 4 years	ELA teacher- 15 years
Mrs. Pam Matthews	ELA Teacher- 4 months	ELA teacher- 7 years

## **Qualitative Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection in a case study has specific expectations for thorough and thoughtful research. Exploring multiple forms of data allows a researcher to gain an overall and detailed perspective of the experiences of a case. In a case study, the researcher collects data from an abundance of sources such as interviews, observations, documents, surveys, focus groups, and artifacts. The data sources collected for this study were teacher interviews, field notes, and documents including district pacing guides, TDOE adoption directives, and USDOE ESSA mandates. These artifacts created a clear, cohesive picture of the foundations for the curriculum adoption and implementation, and the experiences and perceptions of the implementation.

The central area for data collection stemmed from semi-structured interviews. Merriam (1998) stated “The main purpose of interviews is to obtain a special kind of information” (p. 71). For this study, the special information was found within the similarities of the interview protocols for teachers, school leaders, and district personnel (see Appendix A, B, C). For example, both the teacher and school administrators were asked how supported they feel regarding the curriculum implementation. The district leader was asked how they support school administrators and teachers regarding curriculum implementation. The purpose of asking a similarly aligned question was to determine what the district is doing regarding implementation while capturing how the school leaders and teacher feels or perceives this support.

A semi-structured, open-ended format for interviewing ensured that all respondents were asked a set of specific questions but allowed some flexibility to elicit

additional information from interviewees as “each interviewee is expected to have had unique experiences, special stories to tell” (Stake, 1995, p. 65). The interview questions for each participant explored their experiences with curriculum adoption and implementation as well as were aligned to the research questions (see Table 1). Thus, the interview questions also aligned with my Conceptual Framework seen in chapter two and focused on curriculum adoption and implementation, technical and adaptive change and perceptions around the intended and enacted curriculum.

**Table 2**

*Logic of Research Design*

Research Question	Data Collected	Sample Interview Questions
RQ 1: What does the journey from curriculum adoption to implementation look like for one district, middle school, and ELA classroom?	<p>“Information for Districts” - TDOE Website</p> <p>District Pacing Guides, Vision for Learning</p> <p>Curriculum Framework</p>	<p>What was the plan for curriculum implementation/rollout? Describe the process including trainings/PD, material distribution, etc.</p> <p>What was the first thing you did when you found out which curriculum was adopted?</p>
RQ 2: RQ 2: How did educators’ experiences of the adoption and implementation approach shape their perceptions and experiences of the intended and enacted curriculum implementation?	<p>Interviews</p> <p>Curriculum Framework</p>	<p>How supported do you feel regarding the curriculum implementation?</p> <p>What was the intended plan for curriculum implementation/rollout? Describe the process including trainings/PD, material distribution, etc.</p>

		<p>What do you think was the intention of curriculum usage?</p> <p>If you could give advice to others about curriculum implementation, what would it be?</p>
--	--	--

Many of the questions for the participants were similar regardless of their position to determine similarities and differences in experiences and perceptions in order to determine what the district initially planned as the intended curriculum, what information was disseminated to the administration, and teachers at the selected school, and how the teachers, leadership, and administration enacted the curriculum. The goal of the interviews was to have the participants paint as thorough a picture as possible of their experience with the curriculum implementation, while allowing the participants the chance to talk informally “in the natural flow of an interaction” (Patton, 1990, p. 280). The semi-structured format and similarity of questions also aided with coding during analysis.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Eisner (1998) suggests that data analysis is an ongoing and inductive process: “It is simply not possible to predict the flow of events as they unfold, so researchers must adjust their course of action based on emerging conditions that could not have been anticipated” (p. 170). Data analysis in qualitative research is the process of making sense out of the copious amounts of data and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has observed and read about within the case study (Cohen et al., 2007,

Merriam, 2009). Merriam (1998) also points out that the researcher must continually analyze data during data collection in order to determine which direction to pursue as the research study ensues.

Analyzing the answers to the interview questions using Dramaturgical Coding allowed me to look for evidence of technical and adaptive change examples based on how the district intended the curriculum be used, how the administration supported both the district plans and teacher instructions, and how the teacher enacted the curriculum to determine the extent with which each was used and in what areas each was used more. Furthermore, Dramaturgical Coding as described by Saldaña (2016) was used as a frame for laying out the “social drama” of curriculum implementation (p.145). Saldaña describes Dramaturgical Coding as applying:

terms and conventions of character, play script, and production analysis to qualitative data. Dramaturgical Coding attunes the researcher to the qualities, perspectives, and drives of the participant. It also provides a deep understanding of how humans in social action, reaction, and interaction interpret and manage conflict. (p. 145-146).

By applying this coding method as analysis for the interviews I was able to first identify the stories of each participant and then interweave the stories together to better understand the experiences of district leaders, school administrators, and teachers throughout the curriculum adoption and implementation process. To identify the stories of each educator as characters in the curriculum implementation production, I applied the terms as defined by Saldaña (2016) as follows:

- OBJ: participant-actor objectives, motives in the form of action verbs
- CON: conflicts or obstacles confronted by the participant-actor which prevent him or her from achieving his or her objectives
- TAC: participant-actor tactics or strategies to deal with conflicts or obstacles and to achieve his or her objectives
- ATT: participant-actor attitudes toward the setting, others, and the conflict
- EMO: emotions experienced by the participant-actors
- SUB: subtexts, the participant-actor's unspoken thoughts or impression management, usually in the form of gerunds (Saldaña 2016, p. 145-146).

While going through the interviews I employed the steps of what Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to as a list of “common features that recur during any style of qualitative analysis” including: “affixing codes”; “noting reflections”; “sorting and sifting through data”; “isolating patterns and processes”; “elaborating a small set of generalizations”; and “confronting those generalizations” to make meaning of the data (p. 9). Below in Figures 2 and 3 are examples of how I used Dramaturgical Coding to affix patterns and sift through the data.



Figure 2

Sample of Initial Coding with District Leader Interview

83

84 [REDACTED] <sup>TAC/Obj</sup>

85 We do walkthroughs in every building, every month, every building every month. One month

86 we'll do math, and next month we tried to do ELA. However, we, if we walk in, and we're

87 supposed to be doing math, and they're doing ELA, then we just do an ELA observation, and

88 vice versa. But regardless, when we walk in the building, we're doing that.

89

90

91 CC

92 Awesome. Alright, is there anything about implementation that you would want to tell me that

93 I did not ask?

94

95 [REDACTED] <sup>Obj/TAC</sup>

96 We are monitoring our walkthrough data pretty closely and sharing that information back out <sup>TAC</sup>

97 with our principals and our teachers. And really trying to emphasize the progress we're making <sup>Obj</sup>

98 toward Core Action three. If you're familiar with the IPG, you know, if you have culture, then

99 you can go to text. And if you get Core Action one, then we go and score core action two. So

00 <sup>Obj</sup> we're, we are seeing more teachers hitting core action three, we've still got a long way to go.

01 <sup>ATT</sup> But we do feel like we're seeing more teachers moving in that direction. So it's been a

02 <sup>ATT</sup> challenging process. And again, just breaking that habit of I've always taught To Kill a <sup>Con</sup>

03 Mockingbird. So therefore I'm going to teach To Kill a Mockingbird is our biggest challenge, I <sup>Con</sup>

04 think.

05

06

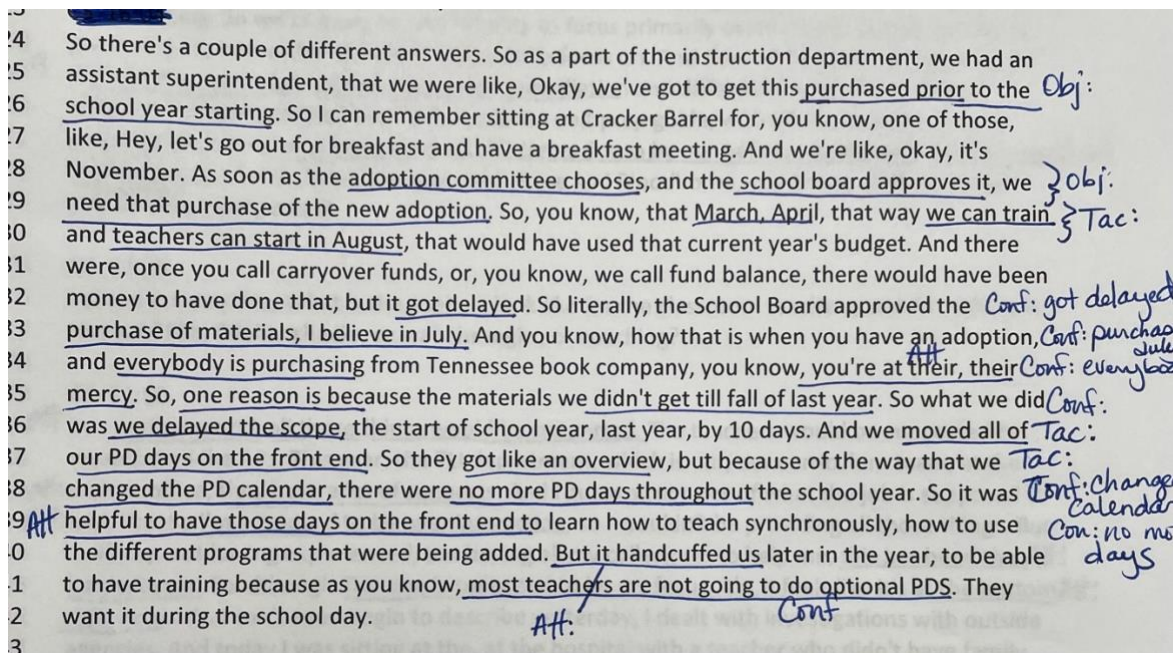
07

08

↑  
Achieved  
Curriculum

### Figure 3

#### Sample of Initial Coding with School Leader Interview



After first round coding of all the interviews, I moved into second round coding as the next step in the analysis process. I created an excel document organized around curriculum adoption and curriculum implementation with each character aligned with an education role and a script that included the six terms from the initial analysis. This allowed me to see the scripts for each educator more clearly. As I considered processes of implementation and adoption within and across each level, I was able to see similarities and differences between objectives and conflicts. I was also able to determine if there were differences in attitudes regarding these objectives and conflicts. Lastly, as will be further discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, subtexts began to surface. I have provided an example of this next step in my data analysis in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Sample of second round coding analysis for all interviews

Curriculum Implementation/ Adoption	Objective	There were some conversations with principals about high quality instructional materials (principals chose a teacher team)  They were trying to train the teachers on what to look for. Through the adoption the state put on several trainings  They (district) wanted continuity				
	Conflict	not at meeting when they selected that curriculum (87) wouldn't know...wouldn't be able to purchase it until budget (113) keep pushing things off (139) teachers already being stressed (140) they were just so overwhelmed (143)	But I don't know that we had a teacher attend, those are attended by district people and then shared out (127)  When it came to adoption of the materials, I was not asked to be part of the front-loading conversations. However I did sit on the actual committees when they voted and that was during the pandemic so it was on zoom meeting (143)	If you don't have a building representative on that adoption committee, it is not always shared.  There's not someone on the adoption committee at my school  There was a publisher that had what our K-1 teachers really wanted but that publisher didn't have an option for third grade  The person who was leading it didn't interject or ask clarifying questions of the teachers (154)  When you settle, you don't always get what is best for your students and for your teachers as well (158)		little bit of a problem with curriculum (199) only getting an excerpt (200) doing the straight curriculum, they don't have any connections (209) mentioned that this is what you have to use (222) see my kids day in/out, walk a fine line without getting in trouble (269) not allowed to go to trainings/did not receive any formal training (315)
		implementation team (101) have one teacher from every school on the committee (103) we added an ELA coach at each school (127) decided to bring those people to committee (127) kind of shifted our timeline (145) implementation team meets monthly (154) do alot of initial training (154) take training back and redeliver (155) shifted our timeline (145) did do training at the ...				

After completing the chart, I then pulled out pieces to determine the story each participant was trying to tell by stringing together the related codes to “discern actions, reactions, and interactions” (Saldaña 2016, p. 147). Dramaturgical Coding allowed me not only to clearly see what was happening individually for each participant, but to create a robust picture of what was happening to them based on the actions of the other participants.

**Limitations**

The benefits of this study lie in the ability to look closely at the experiences of four educators who were involved in curriculum adoption and/or implementation. Each participant provided vital learning in regards to their approaches to adoption and/or implementation. Conversely, the limitations of this study were that implementation in other schools in the district were not explored, there were dilemmas with recruiting additional participants, this study is bound by the parameters of a case study, and insufficient member checking.

This case study specifically studied the experiences and perspectives of one school in Conway County. There were not additional schools within the district that were studied to determine if their experiences and perspectives were similar or differed from those at Walker Middle school. Furthermore, the study only explored experiences and perspectives of one teacher within the school, but this was due to issues with recruiting participants.

Several other teachers and the school's ELA coach were asked to participate but declined due to other commitments resulting in dilemmas in recruiting. Other teachers in other grade levels could have potentially provided additional data regarding their experiences with the implementation of the curriculum. Additionally, the ELA coach of Walker Middle School was approached to participate in the study but was not available to participate in this study. Her perspective could have proven informative to what she was seeing in other classrooms and offered addition perspective regarding implementation.

Further, the district participant was the supervisor to a large team of coordinators who may have worked more closely with schools and could have offered further information regarding their experiences coaching individuals in various schools across the district.

This study being an instrumental case study was bound by the perceptions of the district, school, and classroom in this particular time and place. With a case study it can be difficult to determine the true accuracy of information, especially when the impact of the implementation of the curriculum was not explored in regards to the students making it difficult to determine if the approaches of the district, school, and teacher were in fact supporting learning.

Finally, member checking was also a limitation. All four participants were contacted regarding the findings of this study. Only one responded but did not have any additional information to add potentially making it difficult to validate the findings of this study.

### **Trustworthiness**

Creswell (1998) stated that the researcher is an intimate part of the research process, that biases and values are inherent in the research process and are to be incorporated into interpretations rather than avoided, and that the researcher's voice is heard in the research report. Among those safeguards are what Creswell (1998) refers to as triangulation, which includes collecting data from multiple sources. Creswell says, "Typically, this process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (p. 202). The perspectives and experiences of the participants regarding the approaches for implementation were the focal point of this

study. It was in these perspectives and experiences that provided the basis for the triangulation of this study. This study relied heavily on semi-structured interviews from four participants and documents from the US Department of Education, Tennessee Department of Education, and the Conway County School District, thus triangulation occurred because information was collected from multiple participants at varying positions within the school district. It was within these perspectives that a detailed picture was constructed of the entire process and experiences of these educators as they navigated the curriculum implementation. Triangulation was present by asking similar questions of the participants in an effort to fill in gaps of information from one participant to another.

In order to have participants answer truthfully without fear of repercussion, they were each given an alias to protect their anonymity. The district that they work in was also given an alias along with the name of the school. One document that has the participant's name and alias is kept on a computer that is not accessible to the school district. At the beginning of the interviews, I disclosed the purpose for the research and an overview of the procedures. Each participant was given a copy of the informed consent and then asked to verbally consent on the recording. They were also made aware that they could opt to not answer any question they did not want to answer and opt out of the study at any time. Data that was collected, coded, and analyzed is being kept in a private location. independent of the district and were kept secure in a private location away from the district. Following the acceptance of the completed study, all data will be deleted.

## **Summary**

This qualitative instrumental case study explored the curriculum implementation of one Tennessee middle school that is implementing a literacy curriculum. Data analysis adhered to Creswell's (2007) "naturalistic generalizations," (p. 163) to get an overall sense of the data in its entirety. Through two cycles of Dramaturgical Coding, further analysis of the data was done to determine gain a sense of the motives, conflicts, tactics, attitudes, and subtexts set forth by the participants. Finally, I utilized trustworthiness strategies to minimize bias and check the accuracy of the data collected. In the next chapter, the results of the data analysis will be shared. First, I will discuss the journey of the curriculum from adoption to implementation to answer research question one. Then, within the adoption and implementation, I will discuss the objectives of each participant, the conflicts that got in the way of those objectives, the tactics that they utilized to overcome those obstacles, attitudes and emotions regarding those conflicts, and suggested subtexts.

## **CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS**

This qualitative instrumental case study explored the curriculum implementation of one Tennessee school district and middle school that was implementing a literacy curriculum. It presents the lived experiences of 4 educators in the Conway County School District as they navigated the adoption and implementation of a literacy curriculum within their district.

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to present findings from this study. It begins with a brief description of the participants to set the stage for the participants experiences. The participants' experiences are framed using Dramaturgical Coding and includes the objective or objectives of the participants, conflicts that stood in the way of those objectives, tactics or strategies used to overcome those conflicts, emotions or attitudes regarding the conflicts and strategies, and any subtexts suggested by any of these areas (Saldaña, 2016).

### **Description of Participants and Context**

This study included four participants. All four were from the same school district in Tennessee, Conway County School District. Each participant was in some way involved with implementation of the literacy curriculum either through direct instruction or instructional support. Three of the participants were female and one was male. The participants' experience level ranged from eight to twenty-five years.

Dr. Mary Brown is the Director of Teaching at the district. She supports instruction across Conway County schools and oversees the curriculum implementation



along with her Instructional Department. She has been in this role for three years. She was previously a high school principal before moving to the district level.

Dr. Susan Cates is currently the principal of Walker Middle School. At the time of this study, she had been the principal for roughly ten months. Before moving into the role as principal, she spent ten years at the district level serving in a leadership role for school improvement. This role supported professional development, curriculum, and teacher leaders. Her perspective is unique in that she was at the district level when the curriculum adoption began, serving as one of the leads for the adoption team, and then moved into the principal a few months after implementation began.

Mr. Thomas Leeds is the assistant principal at Walker Middle School. At the time of this interview, he was in his first year as assistant principal at Walker. Overall, he was in his fourth year as an administrator and his nineteenth year as an educator. Mr. Leeds also brings an interesting perspective to this study because he was on the adoption team and then on the implementation team.

Mrs. Pam Matthews is a teacher at Walker Middle School. At the time of her interview, she was in her eighth year of teaching, but her first year in Tennessee. She has experience with a similar curriculum to the one she is implementing at Walker Middle School.

In the state of Tennessee, a specific content/subject is eligible for curriculum adoption. For the 2020-2021 school year, it was literacy curriculum for grades K-12. In response to the upcoming curriculum adoption, Conway County School District began its plan in late 2019. Conway County's Instructional Department met together to determine a

timeline for adoption, board approval, purchase, and implementation. The hope was that much of this process would be completed by March or April of 2020, so that teacher training could get underway, and teachers would be ready for implementation at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year. Unfortunately, this plan was delayed due to budgetary issues, and the school board not approving the purchase of materials until July of 2020. At this point, many of the districts in the state were also ordering materials from the Tennessee Book Company which further delayed the distribution of materials to schools in this district. The materials were not readily available until early fall of 2020, after school had already started, which meant that teachers had to begin teaching with different materials.

### **Curriculum Adoption**

#### *District Adoption: Mediating State Mandates with School and Student Needs*

In this section the response of the district to the state curriculum adoption requirement is shared and each participant's experiences are woven together to illuminate the adoption process. This is because much of the adoption phase was mandated by the state and outlined by the district. A table is provided to outline the objectives, conflicts, tactics, attitudes, and subtexts of the district in its response to the state mandated adoption. This table is followed by explication of the objectives of the district and then conflicts experienced are described with the accompanying tactics, attitudes, and subtexts. This section concludes by connecting the experiences of participants to the ways in which the change approach reinforced either fidelity of implementation or integrity of implementation.

*District Adoption: Lack of expertise and training*

Table 3 below outlines the objective and the connected conflicts that the district faced during their adoption process. It presents the tactics, attitudes, and subtext bore out by the objective and conflicts. This table is followed by explication of that conflict and the accompanying applicable tactics, attitudes, and subtexts.

**Table 3**

*Conflict: Lack of Expertise and Training*

Role	Objective	Conflict	Tactic	Attitude	Subtext
District	Determine which curriculum fit the needs of the school district and the students	Lack of expertise of teachers on the committee (vetting process)  Lack of direct training for those teachers	Broad representation of teachers  Train the trainer model	Believed the teachers settled for the curriculum that “played the game” (Pearson)	Curriculum was not chosen needs of students or meet the objective of the district

The objective of this committee was to determine which of these curriculums would best fit the needs of the school district and the students it served. The formation of the Conway County School District adoption committee was meant to assess each curriculum on the list of approved curriculums from the state to determine which ones would be adopted for each grade band. Because Conway County’s District Instructional Department was aware of the upcoming literacy curriculum adoption, they developed a timeline that included adoption, purchase, and training. They informed principals of the

upcoming literacy curriculum adoption and asked that principals nominate teachers to serve on the adoption committee in compliance with the state guidelines around creating a committee. The Conway County adoption committee's formation followed requirements set forth by Tennessee Department of Education which requires that local districts "appoint a review committee that reviews the textbooks and instructional materials proposed for adoption and make their adoption upon recommendations of such committees" (Information for Districts, n.d.). TDOE also set up guidelines for who should serve on that committee. The TDOE website states

Committees are set up by grade and subject matter fields and composed of teachers, or supervisors and teachers, and parents with children enrolled in the LEA at the time of appointment to a committee. Teachers and supervisors who serve on a committee must be teaching or supervising the respective grade or subject at the time of appointment and must be licensed to teach in the state with endorsements in the subject matter or grade level for which textbooks or instructional materials are being reviewed. (Information for Districts, n.d.)

Seventeen literacy curriculums were selected by the state and placed on the adoption list for district committees to select from.

Two conflicts in opposition to this objective stemmed from the perceived lack of expertise of members of the adoption committee and the lack of direct training for the teachers on the committee. While there were also district staff, principals, and assistant principals on the adoption team, much of the team was comprised of teachers who had been nominated by their principals. Dr. Mary Brown and Dr. Susan Cates did not specify

if there were qualifying criteria sent to principals for selecting teachers from the list of nominations made by the principals, thus creating a conflict around who was serving on the committee and their expertise around selecting a curriculum that would fit the needs of the students in the district.

Also, the lack of direct training for the adoption team members presented a perceived conflict that worked in tandem with the first conflict regarding the expertise of the team members. While some district personnel from the Instructional Department attended training around selecting a curriculum, the teachers on the committee did not attend those trainings.

One tactic employed by the district to alleviate the possible lack of expertise was a train-the-trainer model. Dr. Cates stated that “the person that oversaw the adoption committee met with the teachers several times to prepare them for that actual adoption” (SC 128-129).

Another tactic was to have as Dr. Brown stated, “a broad representation across the district [of teachers]” (MB 102). Despite these two strategies the lack of a true vetting process for teacher committee participants led to a larger conflict regarding the quality of the curriculum that was selected.

#### *District Adoption: Curriculum Selection*

Table 4 below outlines the objective and the second connected conflict that the district faced during their adoption process. It presents the tactics, attitudes, and subtext bore out by the objective and conflicts. This table is followed by explication of that conflict and the accompanying applicable tactics, attitudes, and subtexts.

**Table 4***Conflict: Curriculum Selection*

Role	Objective	Conflict	Tactic	Attitude	Subtext
District	Determine which curriculum fit the needs of the school district and the students	Curriculum Selection	N/A	Believed the teachers settled for the curriculum that “played the game” (Pearson)	Curriculum was not chosen needs of students or meet the objective of the district

Additionally, there was a conflict within the selection of the curriculum. Based on the recommendation of the adoption committee, Conway County adopted two literacy curriculums, one for kindergarten through fifth grade and one for sixth grade through twelfth grade, for the 2020-2021 school year. Elementary (K-5) selected Wonders and Secondary (6-12) selected MyPerspectives. While the state provided a screening instrument to assess the materials in three key areas (Information for Districts, n.d.) Dr. Brown stated that the adoption committee did not use any tool or rubric to select the curriculum. She was unable to say why those curriculums were chosen since she was not at those meetings; however, Dr. Susan Cates attended those meetings and stated that “I don’t think that teachers had a true understanding of what high-quality materials should look like, so teachers settled” (SC 145/146). She was also not able to articulate a tactic or strategy for this conflict.

She felt that “when you settle you don’t always get what’s best for your students and teachers as well. With MyPerspectives, that group of teachers wanted to play the game at the time because it was owned by Pearson and Pearson was our assessment vendor, so let’s go this route” (SC 156-160).

While Dr. Cates did not say that the materials did not meet the criteria she would have liked to see, the subtext suggests that another curriculum from the list could have better met the needs of the district. Despite these concerns, the district moved forward with the adoption of those two curriculums but ran into some obstacles with purchase of materials. The district had to wait until late summer of 2020 to order materials. Those materials did not arrive until late August or September after the school year had started. This delay added complications for the implementation of the curriculum.

The objective of the district for curriculum adoption was to determine which curriculum fit the needs of the school district and the students. Conflicts that were in opposition to this objective was the possible lack of expertise of teachers on the committee, lack of direct training for those teachers on the committee, and potentially the curriculum that was selected. The district employed strategies to overcome the conflicts by having a broad representation of teachers on the committee and utilizing a train the trainer model for the state trainings. The prevalent attitude about the conflicts was that the district settled for the curriculum they adopted because they opted to “played the game” since Pearson was the curriculum developer and the TNReady testing vendor. The subtext suggested by this was that the district selected a curriculum that did not fit their needs nor met their curriculum adoption objective.

Much of the tension surrounding the objective was that the objective itself was borne out of a requirement by a larger governing body, TDOE. TDOE mandated the curriculum adoption, cultivated the curriculum list, and required that an adoption committee be formed, so the district was somewhat beholden to meet an objective they really had no hand in creating.

### *Change Approaches*

The district took steps toward establishing some foundations of the change process that would become the larger implementation initiative within their adoption plan. Initially they attempted to get buy-in from the district at large by having teachers on the adoption committee and by having principals nominate those teachers. Having buy-in by establishing a committee was one example of the technical change approach they utilized; however, they missed an opportunity to begin the work of adaptive change. By not using a vetting tool or establishing vetting criteria for either the committee members or curriculum, they missed an opportunity to lay the groundwork for the kind of shifts they were hoping to see

## **Curriculum Implementation**

### *District Curriculum Implementation: Maintaining Fidelity to Support Student*

#### *Engagement*

In this section, the response of the district to the implementation process is presented. Experiences and perceptions are woven together to create a full picture of the path implementation took for the district participant. Each section includes a table that



shows the objectives, conflicts, tactics, attitudes, and subtexts that district faced while maintaining fidelity to support student engagement.

Table 5 below outlines the objective with the first conflicts that the district faced during implementation. It presents the tactics, attitudes, and subtext bore out by the objective and conflicts. This table is followed by explication of that conflict and the accompanying applicable tactics, attitudes, and subtexts.

**Table 5**

*Conflict: Delay of materials*

Role	Objective	Conflict	Tactic	Attitude	Subtext
District	Use the curriculum with fidelity to ensure teachers emphasize student engagement piece and students doing the cognitive lift	<p>Delay in the arrival of materials</p> <p>Teachers not using materials with fidelity</p>	<p>Delay the start of school year</p> <p>Professional development moved to beginning of the year</p> <p>Adoption team transitioned to implementation team</p>	Felt that the PD was helpful but handcuffed us later in the year	Materials are not being used as intended

For the district, the objective of curriculum implementation centered around teachers using the curriculum with fidelity to ensure that teachers were emphasizing “the importance of that student engagement piece and that they (the students) need to be the ones doing the work and grappling with the text” (MB 316-317). Essentially, the hope was that by implementing high quality instructional materials, teachers would sustain

work in Core Action Three as measured by Achieve the Core's Instructional Practice Guide (IPG). The IPG is an observation rubric that prioritizes what is observable in and expected of classroom instruction when instructional content is aligned to college- and career-ready (CCR) standards (Instructional Practice Guide, n.d.). Within the IPG, there are three areas of focus, Core Action One, Two, and Three. Core Action One is the focus on high-quality text and Core Action Two is the focus on questions that address the thinking required by that particular grade level (Instructional Practice Guide, n.d.). Core Action Three focuses on providing students with the opportunity to engage in that type of thinking and doing the majority of the thinking (Instructional Practice Guide, n.d.). Conway County believed that the curriculum they selected met the criteria for Core Action One and Two, but that Core Action Three needed to be addressed. In order to make this happen, teachers needed training around unit and lesson preparation that supported Core Action Three instruction, but the inability to get the curricular materials before school started created some unforeseen conflicts.

The first conflict the district encountered that hindered implementation was the delay in the arrival of materials. As previously mentioned, the district was not able to purchase materials until the middle of the summer resulting in those materials not being delivered until late September of 2020 after the school year started. Furthermore, due to the COVID pandemic the district delayed the start of the 2020-2021 school year by ten days.

One tactic the district employed was to begin implementation even before materials arrived, so the district moved all their professional development days to those

first ten days; however, this tactic created some unintentional conflicts. Typically, those professional development (PD) days would be interspersed throughout the school year allowing for PD to be utilized to course correct issues that were arising with implementation. According to Dr. Cates “it was helpful to have those days on the front end to learn the different programs, but it handcuffed us later in the year to be able to have trainings [that were needed]” (SC 237-239).

Another tactic the district used to combat all professional development being moved to the beginning of the year was to offer optional after school professional development that teachers could attend to further support implementation, but according to Dr. Cates “We just don’t have enough PD time driven by our needs. Most teachers are not going to optional after-school professional development. They want it during the school day” (SC 240-241; 271).

Both the beginning of the year and afterschool professional development opportunities focused on the unit planning protocol, and what curricular resources to identify and use. By moving all professional development to the beginning of the year, the district was not able to have trainings throughout the year to course-correct for implementation issues.

#### *District Curriculum Implementation: Fidelity of Materials*

Table 6 below outlines the second conflict that the district faced, and the tactics employed to mitigate for these conflicts. This table is followed by explication of that conflict and the accompanying applicable tactics, attitudes, and subtexts.

**Table 6***Conflict: Fidelity of materials*

Role	Objective	Conflict	Tactic	Attitudes	Subtext
District	Use the curriculum with fidelity to ensure teachers emphasize student engagement piece and students doing the cognitive lift	Teachers not using materials with fidelity	<p>ELA coach in each building</p> <p>Monthly walkthroughs</p> <p>Development of the Vision for Learning</p> <p>Principal trainings to support “greater fidelity”</p>	Felt that the teachers do not like using the materials; like what they have been doing	Materials are not being used as intended

Additionally, the district transitioned the curriculum adoption team to the district curriculum implementation team. Dr. Brown stated, “we now have one teacher from every school who’s on that committee” (MB 103).

Further, for the 2021-2022 school year, it was decided that each school would hire an ELA coach, and those coaches were added to the implementation team as well. The intention of that committee was to meet monthly, receive information, and participate in training around the curriculum that they take back to their school building. Much of that training was on the layout of the textbook, resources available within the curriculums, and “extensive training on completing the unit prep” (MB 157). ELA coaches and

teachers on the implementation team also provide information in monthly meetings by reporting on the status of implementation in their buildings.

The district also created a plan of support to aid the implementation process.

Within this plan was their vision for learning:

Using high-quality instructional materials, teachers will prepare learning experiences that include standards-aligned questions and tasks to create rigorous learning opportunities. Students build knowledge that is transferable to experiences outside the classroom through ownership of their reading, writing, thinking, problem solving and collaboration, with support as needed, to ensure access for all. Leadership will support these expectations through a reflective culture of improvement and accountability. In pursuing student mastery of new and prior content, sound assessment practices and the scaffolding of remediation are utilized to address standards gaps. (MCPS Website/pacing guides)

This vision has elements of the Core Actions that are prevalent within their implementation objective. The district also spent time developing their vision for professional development and monitoring the usage of the curriculum by calendaring out the monthly walkthroughs they would participate in to monitor the curriculum implementation. Further, the middle schools received a High-Quality Instructional Materials grant to work with NIET, specifically to support unit and lesson preparation.

To support the use and monitor implementation of the curriculum, district expectations were created regarding weekly PLCs and extending the ELA block to ninety minutes. There has also been collaboration with principals around “greater fidelity to the

curriculum” (MB 267). The district also monitored curriculum usage through walkthroughs and provided feedback to “encourage that fidelity to the curriculum” (MB 271).

These walkthroughs occurred in every building, every month using Achieve the Core’s Instructional Practice Guide (IPG) as the observation tool. Conway County’s Instructional Department mapped out these walkthroughs at the beginning of the year and placed them on their calendars. The district monitored the walkthrough data very closely and then shared data back out with principals. The district was “trying to emphasize the progress we are making toward Core Action Three” (MB 297-298). This emphasis focused on the importance of student engagement and the students being the one doing the work and grappling with complex texts. Dr. Brown felt that “We are seeing more teachers hitting Core Action Three, but we’ve still got a long way to go” (MB 300-301). Further, she stated that the biggest challenge is what was mentioned previously mentioned regarding breaking the habits of teaching what they want because they have always taught it.

The objective of the district for curriculum implementation was to maintain the use of the curriculum to ensure fidelity while supporting teachers to emphasize student engagement and cognitive lift. Conflicts that were in opposition to this objective were delay in the arrival of materials and teachers not using materials with fidelity. To combat these conflicts, the district employed several strategies. Those strategies included delaying the start of school year, moving professional development to beginning of the year, transitioning the adoption team to an implementation team, and adding an ELA

coach to school. The district also participated in monthly walkthroughs, developed a vision for learning, and provided principals with training to support greater fidelity. The attitudes regarding these tactics were generally positive but only viewed as separate pieces. Suggested within this was that the district attempted to create a sound plan to support implementation, but as seen in the following sections, the tactics of the district led to further conflicts for school leaders and teachers.

*Administrator Curriculum Implementation: Balancing District Expectations and Teacher Needs*

In this section, the response of the administrator to the implementation process is presented. Experiences and perceptions are woven together to create a full picture of the path implementation took for the administrator. Each section includes a table that shows the objectives, conflicts, tactics, attitudes, and subtexts that district faced while balancing district expectations and the needs of the teachers in her building.

Table 7 below outlines the first big conflict that the school level administrator and the tactics she employed to alleviate the conflict. This table is followed by explication of that conflict and the accompanying applicable tactics, attitudes, and subtexts.

**Table 7**

*Conflict: Incorrect use of materials*

Role	Objective	Conflict	Tactic	Attitude	Subtext
Administrator	Support the district curriculum implementation plan within their buildings	Teachers not using the curriculum as they should	Know where to push and where to back off	District is missing the mark by pushing fidelity	We are not serving teachers the way we should

			Buffering the district message		around the curriculum
			Support teachers in using their judgement and autonomy		

The objective of the administrators was to support the district curriculum implementation plan within their buildings which was fidelity to the curriculum in order to support Core Action Three; however, the administrator at Walker Middle school knew that despite the district's expectations regarding "fidelity to the curriculum... [it] had to take a backseat... and [I] had to reestablish expectations" (SC 170). Dr. Cates was in a unique position having been at the district level during the adoption process and then moving into the principal role at this school once implementation had begun but had limited training regarding the actual use of the curriculum.

The first conflict that the school leader encountered was that teachers were not using the curriculum as they should. She knew that "more seasoned teachers were not using the curriculum as it was supposed to be at that point" (SC 174-175). One teacher came to her and said "I've always done *The Outsiders* as my final book, and I am going to die on it if I need to" (SC 177-178).

One tactic that she employed was deciding where to hold strong and where to make concessions. Even though *The Outsiders* was not a book in MyPerspectives, she was willing to work with the teacher to honor this request. She stated that "it was hard to



juggle what I knew I needed to do, but also coming in midstream. I always say you have to know when to take your foot off the gas. And that was not the time and place to try to come in here and say you've got all these new materials after the school year started without the proper training. You have to totally switch and try to implement with fidelity" (SC 182-186).

Another tactic that school leaders employed was buffering the message of the district to further support teachers. While fidelity to the implementation of the curriculum was the expectation of the district due to a state law passed earlier in the year that required that adopted materials must be used, the Dr. Cates attempted to shield some of that messaging for them by helping teachers use their teacher judgement regarding what to use and where their autonomy comes in. She also stated that because she is the principal she is "supposed to be over instruction... this has been the hardest year. Tier 1 is supposed to be my focus, it feels like it's at the bottom. I'm trying to grapple with how to do a reset to be able to get back to what I'm supposed to focus on" (SC 285-291).

*Administrator Curriculum Implementation: Balancing administrator responsibilities*

Table 8 below outlines the next big conflict that the district faced in regards to their objective for implementation. This table is followed by explication of that conflict and the accompanying applicable tactics, attitudes, and subtexts.

**Table 8**

*Conflict: Balancing Responsibility*

Role	Objective	Conflict	Tactic	Attitude	Subtext
Administrator	Support the district	Difficult to support		Felt that the	We are not serving

	curriculum implementation plan within their buildings	implementation with other admin responsibilities meaning she cannot be in classrooms as often as she would like		district was missing the mark by pushing fidelity	teachers the way we should around the curriculum
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Additionally, she felt that it was difficult to support implementation because “there’s so many other things on top of it” (SC 315). Even though she felt supported by her assistant principals, ELA coaches, and district coordinators, she still felt like there was a separation. Adding to this separation was the awarding of a grant for implementation of high-quality instruction materials that was supported by NIET. She was copied on all information but has not been able to attend many of the professional development opportunities provided by NIET. She stated, “the best trainings are when the teacher leaders and principals are training together” (SC 326-327). Additionally, in response to the issues she has seen around implementation, Dr. Cates stated

We’ve got to have a better understanding of what all the components are. If we’re gonna hold our teachers to teach with fidelity of these materials, we have to understand why it is high quality. What knowledge are we trying to gain from it because there’s still a disconnect of teachers teaching standards versus building knowledge. We are missing the mark in helping our teachers get better. (SC 353; 372; 378-380)

Unspoken in this sentiment, was the idea that the district as a whole was missing the mark by pushing fidelity because that was not what was going to push teachers to address Core Action Three in their classrooms.

The objective for administrators for curriculum implementation was to support the district curriculum implementation plan within their buildings meaning they were balancing district expectations and teacher needs. The conflicts that stood in opposition to this objective were teachers not using the curriculum as they should and as building administrators it was difficult to support implementation with their other administrator responsibilities. Tactics employed to overcome these obstacles were knowing when to push and when to back off, buffering the district messaging around implementation, and supporting teachers in using their judgement and autonomy within the curriculum. Suggested within this was that the district was missing the mark by pushing fidelity.

Administrators were caught in the middle of the implementation objective from the district and the implementation objective of the teachers, therefore creating a tension between their role in implementation and how they support teachers as they navigate their role in implementation.

### *Teacher Curriculum Implementation: Navigating Curriculum Expectations with Student Needs*

In this section, the response of the teacher to the implementation process is presented. Experiences and perceptions are presented through their objective, conflicts, tactics, attitudes, and subtexts to narrate how the teachers navigated curriculum expectations with students' needs.

Table 9 below outlines the objective and the first conflict that the teachers faced in regards to their objective for implementation. This table is followed by explication of that conflict and the accompanying applicable tactics, attitudes, and subtexts.

**Table 9**

*Conflict: Upfront training*

Role	Objective	Conflict	Tactic	Attitude	Subtext
Teacher	Present the curriculum in a way that supported learning for students while adhering to the curriculum framework and district pacing guides	If hired late, could miss out on training	Virtual training but offered later in the year  Assistance from the ELA coach	Feel supported but lack autonomy	Have to do the curriculum as is

For teachers, the objective of implementation was to present the curriculum in a way that supported learning for students while adhering to the curriculum framework and district pacing guides. Pam Matthews, a teacher at Walker Middle School stated “Because we are being tested and the county purchased this program, I feel like as long as I am within the [curriculum] framework and the pacing guide, I’m okay” (PM 222-225). Furthering this point, Thomas Leeds, an assistant principal also said, “Most people

feel like it is just the expectation” (TL 88). While the objective to follow the curriculum framework and district pacing guides was well intentioned, it led to the first conflict.

The district wanted teachers to align to the curriculum and follow the pacing guide, but if a teacher was hired after a certain point and/or there was a hold up with paperwork, teachers were not able to participate in the beginning-of-the-year district training regarding the curriculum. Mrs. Matthews was hired very close to the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. Due to her paperwork not yet being processed, she was not able to take part in any of the formal district training on the curriculum.

One tactic for this conflict was a virtual training, but it was not offered until well into the school year. Mrs. Matthews stated “One of the staff members from the district kind of went through how it was basically outlined. And that was the first time that I had any formal training” (PM 317-319).

Another solution to the lack of training was assistance from her school-based ELA coach. The coach helped her access the platform and sent her pacing guides so she could begin planning. Mrs. Matthews felt that having had previous experience with a similar curriculum made it easier to navigate learning the curriculum, but not all teachers had similar knowledge.

#### *Teacher Curriculum Implementation: Curriculum Issues*

Table 10 below outlines the next conflict that the teachers faced in regards to their objective for implementation. This table is followed by explication of that conflict and the accompanying applicable tactics, attitudes, and subtexts.

**Table 10***Conflict: Curriculum issues*

Role	Objective	Conflict	Tactic	Attitude	Subtext
Teacher	Present the curriculum in a way that supported learning for students while adhering to the curriculum framework and district pacing guides	Curriculum lacked pieces	Supplement the curriculum	Feel supported but lack autonomy	Have to do the curriculum as is

By far the biggest conflict was that teachers felt to varying degrees that the curriculum lacked in certain areas which meant they felt the need to supplement or the curriculum with outside materials; however, there was a perception that teachers were not afforded the autonomy to complement the curriculum as they saw fit. Mr. Thomas Leeds, a former teacher in the district and current assistant principal at Walker Middle School, said “a lot of people felt pigeonholed that they had to follow a certain guide that put everybody on the same page and pace. You want the freedom to be able to teach the things you love” (TL 62-64).

Mrs. Matthews echoes this sentiment when discussing district walkthroughs. She said, “I’ve heard that if someone comes in your class [from the district] make sure your where your supposed to be in your lesson” (PM 247-248).

Further complicating this issue was that neither Mr. Leeds nor Mrs. Matthews could specifically pinpoint an email or memo that explicitly named this mandate. Mr. Leeds even went so far as to say

I know it’s gonna sound crazy, but most people feel like it’s just the expectation, a kind of unspoken expectation. Don’t strive to hard to bring in any outside resources. We found the curriculum for you, use and be happy. I think that’s the overall feeling and I don’t know where that feeling is coming from (TL 90-95).

According to both, questions from the district about teachers using the curriculum when administrators were in classrooms and district walkthroughs to check implementation and fidelity led to this perception.

Mrs. Matthews recognizes the district’s push to follow the curriculum very closely, but also stated that she “tells the kids we’re gonna use all of it, but just bounce it out a little bit” (PM 207). Mrs. Matthews also stated that one of the issues with the curriculum is that

You’re only getting an excerpt; you’re not getting a whole book. You only have one component of it [the story]. You only have a little component of it, and there’s so much more to be added within that. The curriculum talks about how you read and reread a text, but I feel like there is no real-world connection. (PM 201- 204)

One strategy she and her fellow teachers employed was to complement the curriculum with other resources like readers workshop and bringing in additional texts. Specifically, Mrs. Matthews used a supplemental teaching book that teaches different reading strategies and utilized mini lessons to support the areas of that district adopted curriculum was missing according to her. As previously discussed, Dr. Cates, the principal at Walker Middle School, afforded some autonomy to her teachers because she was trying to meet district expectation while also attempting to get them trained around what makes materials, texts, etc. high-quality. She let teachers teach novels not utilized in the curriculum and, in the case of Mrs. Matthews, has supported her use of Readers Workshop and other outside materials. While she feels like this a good solution to some of the shortcomings she sees in the curriculum, the larger issue remains regarding fidelity to the curriculum and pacing guides set forth by the district as an avenue to reach Core Action Three.

Both Mr. Leeds and Mrs. Matthews felt that the district was attempting to support the implementation of the curriculum, but that support yielded unintended consequences of teachers feeling like they had no freedom or autonomy despite the fact that they also felt that they needed to add additional resources to the curriculum. Suggesting that the district may be offering support around areas that do not need support.

The objective of curriculum implementation for teachers was to present the curriculum in a way that supported learning for students while adhering to the curriculum framework and district pacing guides which meant navigating curriculum expectations with student needs. One conflict that was encountered in response to this objective was



that if a teacher was hired late that teacher would miss out on training which in turn meant that they would be unable to adhere to the district objective of fidelity. The other conflict was that the curriculum lacked certain pieces that would fully support student learning. In response to the conflicts, tactics were employed to overcome these obstacles. These tactics were offering virtual trainings later in the year to support usage of the curriculum and supplementing the curriculum with outside resources to support student learning. Overall, the attitudes surrounding implementation were that teachers felt supported, but also felt as though they lacked autonomy.

Much of the negative perceptions around autonomy stemmed from the teachers essentially being the third level of implementation even though they were the actual enactors of the curriculum implementation. They were in essence wholly responsible for instruction but the last to know the plans or even hear those plans firsthand.

### *Change Approaches*

The district made efforts to reinforce the mindsets and practices they believed would be beneficial to implementation. They were clear on their objective for implementation and created a vision for learning for all teachers in the district. They began the process by establishing some conditions for success through the technical change approaches of providing professional development, expectations for weekly professional learning communities, and extending the literacy block to 90 minutes. Even their objective possessed potential adaptive change in the form of Core Action Three practices. Within each of these was the prospect to weave in adaptive change approaches; however, missed opportunities prevented adaptive change from coming to fruition.

Some of these missed opportunities were directly tied to the technical change put in place and teachers were on the receiving end of this technical change. For instance, professional development offerings were around unit and lesson preparation. Within those trainings were an opportunity to fully explain why the district is transitioning to a more structured curriculum which was to shift to classrooms more focused on Core Action Three, but Dr. Brown explained that those trainings were about filling out the unit and lesson preparation template. Another example is the transition of the adoption team to the implementation team and placing a teacher and ELA coach from every school on the team. Mrs. Matthews stated that her ELA coach supported her when she was not able to attend training, but the coach's assistance was about accessing the materials on the online curriculum platform. Those members could be used to reinforce the shifts in beliefs and practices that the district is trying to instill, but their role was to report fidelity of curriculum use of the teachers in their building and re-deliver training in around further technical change areas like resources and lesson preparation.

It seems the school leader was moving in the right direction of adaptive change approaches when she allowed teachers some autonomy in bringing in outside materials, but that autonomy was not attached to reinforcing the work the district wanted in Core Action Three. Dr. Cates possessed some of the understanding of the shifts in mindsets and practices that the district was trying to cultivate because she thought they were missing the mark by pushing fidelity. Embedded within her comments was the idea that in order to see the change they were hoping for, the district should have pushed integrity

or paired the fidelity of implementation with explicit explanations of the areas of the curriculum that directly support Core Action Three practices.

### **Summary**

This qualitative instrumental case study explored the curriculum adoption and implementation of one Tennessee school district and middle school that was implementing a literacy curriculum. It presented the lived experiences of four educators in the Conway County School District as they navigate the implementation of a literacy curriculum within their district. Those educators held positions at central office, principal, assistant principal, and teacher. All of whom had some experience with implementing the curriculum.

Using Dramaturgical Coding allowed for the presentation of results in the following manner: the objective or objectives brought forth by the participants, conflicts that stood in the way of those objectives, tactics or strategies used to overcome those conflicts, emotions or attitudes regarding the conflicts and strategies, and any subtexts suggested by any of these areas (Saldaña, 2016). The purpose of Chapter 4 was to present key findings from this study. It begins with a brief description of the participants and the context of the curriculum adoption. The findings are discussed under the frame of Dramaturgical Coding (Saldaña, 2016). The results of the study inform an understanding of the ways in which technical and adaptive change were utilized to reinforce either fidelity of implementation or integrity of implementation and whether there were differences between the intended and enacted curriculum. Of particular interest are the similarities and possible contradictions between the objectives of the participant and the

unintended conflicts that could be addressed by more closely aligning objectives and tactics. The results will further be discussed in the findings of Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

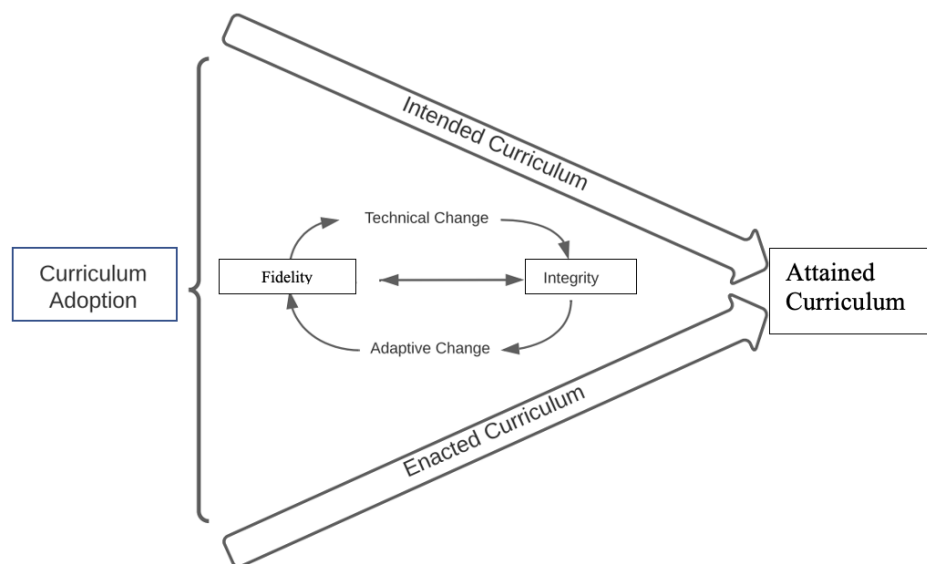
This chapter discusses the findings of this qualitative case study, specifically as an instrumental case study looking at the *issue* of adoption and implementation for one school district, middle school, and teacher. This chapter begins with a summary of the previous four chapters. Then moves into significant findings and implications for those findings. Following those discussions, final thoughts and future studies will be considered.

### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to follow the journey of a curriculum from adoption to implementation in one school district middle school, and ELA classroom. Within this journey, study the experiences educators had regarding the adoption and implementation of the curriculum, and if those experiences affected their perceptions regarding the intended and enacted curriculum. Further, if those experiences were at all influenced by the use of technical and adaptive change approaches. The intention of this study was not to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum itself, but to explore perceptions regarding the implementation of the curriculum to determine best practices for districts and schools to employ during implementation of their chosen curriculum. This study does not aim to set forth a one size fits all approach to implementation, but rather help districts create a sound understanding of the implementation process through technical and adaptive change lenses to measure the impact of the intended and enacted curriculum.

In chapter one, the conceptual framework, and the research problems

were presented. A discussion of the changes in educational policy brought forth by replacement of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provided broad context for the push to use prepackaged, structured curriculum as a way to meet rigorous demanding standards. Further narrowing that context was a discussion of the textbook adoption policy in the state of Tennessee. The adoption policy was the beginning of the statement of the problem and purpose of the study because it created the frame for the top-down approach utilized by those who make decisions regarding the adoption and implementation of the curriculum and the underlying tensions for those actually doing the implementation or enactment of the curriculum (Dusenbury, Brannigan, Falco, & Hansen, 2003, p. 251). Within the statement of the problem, is the introduction of technical and adaptive change and how both can potentially be utilized to alleviate these tensions to bridge possible gaps between the intended and enacted curriculum (Hefeitz, et. al., 2009; Kurtz, et. al., 2010). The discussion around technical and adaptive change and intended and enacted curriculum led to the conceptual framework (see Figure 1 below) and its central position within this study.

**Figure 1***Curriculum Implementation Process*

Closing out chapter one was the introduction of the research questions, the research design, methodology, and the significance of the study.

In chapter two, the review of literature included the historical overview of curriculum beginning with the shift of curriculum as a discipline around 1918 (Varbelow, 2015). The chapter then moved into curriculum implementation as a construct that created the parameters for the study by defining curriculum implementation as the process by which the teacher makes meaning of the materials given to use and adjusts those materials based on classroom context, the needs of the student, and experiences, regardless of the original intent of the curriculum developers. The next three sections of the review of literature discuss technical and adaptive change, fidelity and integrity, and

intended and enacted curriculum. Each section makes the case for and provides parameters for the study as it moves into chapters three, four, and five.

The methodology in chapter three reported the rationale and data collection procedures and analysis for the instrumental case study. An instrumental case study seeks to understand the how and why of a particular phenomenon (Stake, 1995). Because this study explored the ways in which a district implemented the curriculum by understanding experiences and perceptions, the case was bound by time, and the phenomena happened in a specified place, one school district and more specifically one school and classroom in that district. In this way the phenomenon is as Hatch (2002) states “a special kind of qualitative work that investigates a contextualized contemporary phenomenon within specified boundaries” (p. 30). The phenomenon was looking at a school district in Tennessee that had adopted a curriculum from the Tennessee Department of Education’s approved list in general, and a school that was supporting teacher use of the curriculum in particular. Further, by applying Dramaturgical Coding as the method for analysis for the interviews I was able to identify the stories of each participant and then interweave the stories together to better understand the experiences of district leaders, school administrators, and teachers throughout the curriculum adoption and implementation process (Saldaña, 2016).

Interviews and documents were analyzed in chapter four. The stories of four individuals from varying positions within the district were reconstructed to create narratives that followed the same general pattern: objective or objectives brought forth by the participants, conflicts that stood in the way of those objectives, tactics or strategies



used to overcome those conflicts, emotions or attitudes regarding the conflicts and strategies, and any subtexts suggested by any of these areas (Saldaña, 2016). Of interest were the similarities and possible contradictions between the objectives of the participant and the unintended conflicts that could be addressed by more closely aligning objectives and tactics.

### Looking Across Participants Experiences

Table 11 below shows a cross view of the objectives, conflicts, tactics, attitudes, and subtext of each participant that aided in analysis and further helped distinguish the significant findings of this study.

**Table 11**

#### *Cross Participant Analysis*

Role	Objective(s)	Conflict(s)	Tactic(s)	Attitude(s)	Subtext(s)
District	<p>Adoption: determine which curriculum fit the needs of the school district and the students</p> <p>Implementation: use the curriculum with fidelity to ensure teachers emphasize student engagement</p>	<p>Adoption: lack of expertise of teachers on the committee</p> <p>Lack of direct training for those teachers</p> <p>Curriculum selected</p> <p>Implementation: Delay in the arrival of materials</p> <p>Teachers not using materials with fidelity</p>	<p>Adoption: broad representation of teachers</p> <p>Train the trainer model</p> <p>Implementation: Delay the start of school year</p> <p>Professional development moved to</p>	<p>Adoption: settled for the curriculum that “played the game” (Pearson)</p> <p>Implementation: PD was helpful but handcuffed us later in the year</p>	<p>Adoption: Curriculum does not meet the needs of students or meet the objective of the district</p>

	piece and students doing the cognitive lift		<p>beginning of the year Adoption team transitioned to implementation team</p> <p>ELA coach in each building</p> <p>Monthly walkthroughs</p> <p>Development of the Vision for Learning</p> <p>Principal trainings to support “greater fidelity”</p>		
School Leaders	Implementation: support the district curriculum implementation plan within their buildings	<p>Implementation: teachers not using the curriculum as they should</p> <p>Difficult to support implementation with other admin responsibilities</p>	<p>Implementation: know where to push and where to back off</p> <p>Buffering the district message</p> <p>Support teachers in using their judgement and autonomy</p>	Implementation:	Implementation: District is missing the mark by pushing fidelity
Teacher	Implementation: present the curriculum in a way that supported learning for students while adhering to the curriculum framework and	<p>Implementation: if hired late, could miss out on training</p> <p>Curriculum lacked pieces</p>	<p>Implementation: virtual training but offered later in the year</p> <p>Supplement the curriculum</p>	Implementation: feel supported but lack autonomy	Implementation: Have to do the curriculum as is

	district pacing guides				
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By viewing the experiences together in a larger table, it shows similarities and differences between each participant. In addition to these similarities and differences, it is clear how tactics employed by one group for their conflict create conflicts experienced by others. For example, the district experienced conflict early on during adoption with the perceived lack of expertise of the teachers on the adoption committee coupled with the lack of direct training for the committee members. This conflict, according to the district participant, resulted in the district feeling like they did not select a curriculum that met the needs of their students because those teachers on the committee were not selecting based on what were high-quality materials which they were not necessarily trained around identifying, but rather selecting a curriculum from the same vendor that created the Tennessee achievement tests. Consequently, this conflict created an issue for teachers during implementation. The teacher participant felt that the curriculum lacked pieces needed to fully teach her students resulting in the need to supplement the curriculum with additional, outside materials.

Another area where a tactic in response to one conflict for a participant resulted in an unintended consequence for another participant group is the district's conflict of the teachers not using the curriculum with fidelity. The district responded with the tactic of monthly walkthroughs and planning an ELA coach in every building to monitor fidelity. This tactic resulted in the teachers feeling as if

they had no autonomy in their classrooms. They also felt that they needed to follow the curriculum lockstep to stay out of trouble with the district, a sentiment that was not intended by the district.

These two instances present some of the findings of this study that further support how complicated curriculum implementation is and how important it is for each participant of implementation to have clarity of their role and the overall objective for the implementation. Further, it illuminates the need to fully understand the implications of tactics in response to conflicts that arise.

## **Discussion**

On a basic level, the findings of this study mirrored the game of “Telephone” where the message at the beginning was not the message that was heard at the end. Unfortunately, the distorted message at the end fell on those educators tasked with implementing the curriculum in their classrooms. Much of that stemmed from the tension created by the top-down approach utilized from adoption to implementation. This lack of clarity surrounding the intention of implementation resulted in teachers feeling as though they lacked autonomy in their teaching practices and ultimately their classrooms. While several conflicts were discussed in chapter four, the above issue, the lack of clarity around expectations for implementation, could be described as the super-conflict as all other conflicts flow from it. Furthering this issue is that between the district, the administrators, and the teacher, the objectives had overlap but were not completely aligned so the outcomes were in effect different. Furthermore, the three different dichotomies

found in the conceptual framework often worked in opposition to one another as opposed to having these areas work together. The subsequent sections focus on the dichotomies of intended and enacted curriculum, technical and adaptive change, and fidelity and integrity of implementation

### *Intended and Enacted Curriculum*

Sitting side-by-side with the balance of technical and adaptive change approaches is the perceived tension between the intended and enacted curriculum and the roles that integrity and fidelity play within both. One misconception bore out of curriculum implementation was the expectation that teachers needed to adhere to the original intent of the curriculum by either the curriculum developer or the district. Teachers want the freedom to be flexible given prescription-based programs (Paris, 1993). This sentiment is expressed several times in the interviews with Mr. Leeds, the assistant principal participant, and Mrs. Matthews, the teacher participant. Mr. Leeds, in particular, stated three times throughout his interview that “teachers felt pigeon-holed” when discussing perceptions of the curriculum. He further stated

I speak for everyone. Teachers want to be able to go in and teach what they love, not follow a roadmap from the district. You don't want someone dictating how you're going to teach versus doing it in a way that you see fit. As a professional educator, you should be given that freedom.

This is the impetus for the tension between the intended and enacted curriculum and very real problem the district is facing.

The state of Tennessee enacted mandates for the use of adopted curricular materials. Even going so far as to fine on districts and schools if the materials were not utilized, but districts have some freedom in how they leverage the implementation process; however, the state never used the word fidelity when mandating the use of the adopted materials. The perception from the district, often referred to as “they” throughout the interviews, was that teachers must use the curriculum with fidelity with both Mr. Leeds and Mrs. Matthews basically stating that the school district adopted new curriculum materials, so they must use them. Moreover, this perception was reinforced by a fear of the district, despite not having any evidence of repercussions.

The findings of this study reinforce the idea that the intended and enacted curriculum do not have to be in opposition to one another. Shifting the attention from fidelity to integrity of implementation pushes all stakeholders to focus on the outcomes for students and the curriculum as the vehicle to support learning alleviating the feelings of teachers lacking autonomy.

#### *Technical and Adaptive Change Approaches*

When approaching a large-scale innovation such as a district wide curriculum implementation, it is expected that there will be hiccups, but in education those hiccups generally mean abandoning what is not working and returning the status quo. Technical and adaptive change approaches provide the necessary supports to keep that from happening. As previously discussed in the review of literature, teachers are central to whether a curriculum is delivered consistently, effectively, and

with efficacy; and without a thoughtful implementation process, curriculum becomes as Mahan (1972) states, "Misused, abused, and unused curricula skeletons in the closets of most school(s)" (p. 159; Lochner, Conrad, and Graham, 2015).

The district gave due diligence to several areas that are deemed as technical change. This focus on technical change was at times in direct opposition to their objective for implementation, an adaptive change, that teachers use the curriculum with fidelity emphasizing "the importance of that student engagement piece and that they (the students) need to be the ones doing the work and grappling with the text." Consequently, once this objective or goal was handed down to the teachers, they teachers only heard use the curriculum with fidelity. This could be because the district had primarily attended to technical change areas when supporting implementation. For example, the district provided professional development, but those trainings were mostly around how to access the online platform of the curriculum and how to utilize the unit planning guide and lesson planning guides. In interviews with Dr. Mary Brown, the district leader over curriculum and learning, and Dr. Susan Cates, the principal at Walker Middle School, both discussed the professional development opportunities to some degree. When asked about perceptions or overall feelings surrounding the curriculum implementation both participants intimated that the teachers did not like it. When asked why, they each said that teachers like teaching what they've always taught. Following that question, each was asked about any professional development that was geared toward mindsets and beliefs, or if that was embedded within their current professional development. Both responded that mindsets and beliefs were not

addressed. Going back to the district objective, if the goal is to push teachers to utilize the curriculum in a way that supports the importance of student engagement and cognitive lift, it is problematic that the beliefs of teachers around student engagement were not the primary focus or directly woven into all professional development. That is where adaptive change comes into play to support curriculum implementation.

At the time of this study, Conway County School District was grappling with adaptive change challenges due to an imbalance of technical change in their approach. Further, adaptive challenges happen when we ask people to adopt new beliefs and we want to help people see the ways that they have been doing things in the past will no longer work for them (Hefeitz, et. al., 2009). The district was asking teachers to adopt a new curriculum, one that was more structured than they were accustomed to, all while aiming for Core Action Three (Achieve the Core Instructional Practice Guide). Dr. Cates stated that we must help teachers understand why high-quality materials are important to instruction and show them the disconnect between teaching standards and building knowledge. She further recognizes that it's a big shift for many of the teachers in her district, but that they miss the mark in helping our teachers get better, specifically with their professional development offerings.

The findings of this study show the possibilities of successful implementation within the balance of approaches utilizing technical and adaptive change, and how that balance could alleviate some of the negative feelings teachers had around the implementation of the curriculum. Further, by attending to technical and adaptive change with the same care, the implementers of the curriculum (typically teachers) have



a robust support system to better address the objective or objectives of those at the district and administrative levels and can experience a level of success with curriculum implementation.

### *Fidelity and Integrity*

To begin with, the district objective for implementation was to use the curriculum with fidelity to ensure teachers emphasize student engagement and push students to do the cognitive lift (Core Action Three) but if the conflicts found within the adoption of the curriculum are viewed in contrast to this objective the district potentially selected a curriculum that could not meet its implementation objective without employing some of the tactics within the teacher implementation section such as supplementing the curriculum with additional resources. This, however, further created tension because the teachers' perceptions were to do the curriculum with fidelity. They did not have a sense of the second part of the objective that contained why the district wanted fidelity.

Next, the district provided professional development opportunities at the beginning of the school year as a tactic to combat the late arrival of materials, but if hired late a teacher would not be able to participate in those trainings thus hindering their ability to implement the curriculum with fidelity and potentially not meeting the expectations of the district objective. Furthermore, the teacher would then have to fill in the gaps of their lack of training by reverting to what they have always

done or how they were taught, seemingly missing the mark for student engagement and cognitive lift.

The district employed many tactics and strategies to support their objective for implementation, such as monthly walkthroughs, principal trainings, vision for learning. Many of these strategies fall into the category of technical change and teacher adherence to the intended curriculum through fidelity. The walkthroughs, for instance, were perceived by teachers as fidelity checks, not implementation support, which ultimately led to teachers feeling a lack of autonomy in their teaching practices and creating negative attitudes regarding the curriculum. School leaders tried to combat some of those perceptions by allowing teachers some freedom to make decisions about what to use and allowing outside materials to be brought in to support the curriculum and student learning, which was an excellent strategy, but only if paired with the shifts they were trying to cultivate.

The other area of note was that the teacher and assistant principal participants did not mention Core Action Three in their interviews despite it being deeply embedded in the district objective for implementation and the vision for learning. Their focus was essentially on the enacted curriculum: how they were utilizing the curriculum and what they were doing in their classrooms. Connecting to these ideas is that both mentioned that the advice they would give to districts planning to implement a curriculum would be to talk to teachers first and determine how best to utilize the curriculum. Interestingly, the district participant said that her advice would be to have a plan and stick with it. The principal participant said it

was to do more training around understanding what deems a material high-quality and what knowledge they were trying to get students to gain from those materials.

Within these findings is the idea that while there was a district plan for adoption and implementation, it did not take into account technical and adaptive change approaches nor the intended and enacted curriculum as they pertain to teacher practices. Additionally, by not attending to these areas, the full message of the implementation objective did not reach teachers as intended. Further, by not accounting for each respectively, lack of clarity created negative feelings regarding the curriculum implementation.

### **Recommendations for Action**

#### *Districts*

From this study we learn that district administrators, especially those responsible for creating the processes by which instructional and curricular decisions are made, could benefit from an understanding of the effects of technical and adaptive change approaches. Working in tandem with technical and adaptive change and focusing on integrity of the curriculum rather than fidelity would go a long way in alleviating negative perceptions and facilitate learning around what makes materials high-quality. Further, it would provide clarity for messaging that must go through many hands before reaching those implementing the curriculum.

Though not a focus for this study, shifting effort to the attained curriculum, which is the knowledge, understanding, skills, etc. that students actually acquire from instruction, would also support the efforts of the district's

implementation objective, though it would need to be modified to no longer say implement with fidelity (Kurtz, et. al., 2010).

It is recommended that district explore the implications of tactics that they employ in response to conflicts that arise to ensure that these tactics do not have unintended consequences for the administrators and teachers. For example, Conway County utilized walkthroughs to monitor implementation. Coming from the district, these walkthroughs were to see how teachers were doing with the curriculum- a tactic to support their objective and alleviate the conflict of teachers not using the curriculum; however, unintentionally these walkthroughs created negative perceptions of the district and reinforced the idea of fidelity to the curriculum. To alleviate these negative perceptions, districts should focus on the practices that they want to instill rather than only focusing on the use of the curriculum.

### *Schools*

Similar to the practices of Dr. Cates, school leaders should consider how to buffer district messages to fully support their teachers throughout implementation. If the district is offering professional development that supports more of the technical changes, the principal can balance it by providing complimentary training that further reinforces the why behind the goal of the PD. School leaders should also participate in professional development training in how best to involve teachers in a curriculum implementation process and how to support the curriculum once it is in the classroom.

### *Teachers*

Teachers should determine how to meet the demands of their state, district, or school while balancing what is in the best interest of students. Like school leaders, if the district is only providing technical change approaches and solutions, they should seek to understand the entire story behind changes or shifts. Spend time going through the curriculum to lift out pieces that align to district goals and learn how to do those pieces well.

### *Curriculum Developers and Beyond*

Curriculum developers should recognize the need for more flexible resource materials and information on how to use those materials designed to give teachers the freedom they need to meet the wide range of student needs. These companies should ensure that they have practitioners of the curriculum on staff to support implementation, not just salespeople.

Teacher education programs should include components that give preservice teachers direct experience working with structured, prepackaged curriculum and how those materials might exemplify (or not) high quality instructional materials.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This qualitative case study provided an opportunity to determine the need for future research. One particular area of interest is a focus on the attained curriculum. A longitudinal study exploring how the use of the curriculum impacted student learning could further support the findings of the study and potentially provide the opportunity

to scale it to other areas of innovation implementation. Education is quick to change innovations without giving due diligence to the amount of time it takes for that innovation to go to scale. Furthermore, unlike other areas of society, the scaling of successful instructional programs from a few settings to widespread use across a range of contexts is very difficult (Dede, Honan, & Peters, 2005). This might be due to how slowly it takes for the data to reflect that the innovation is producing positive results for students. Further, by continuing down the line of studying the effects of change processes all the way to students would go a long way in determining if this study had further reached effects.

Another area of consideration would be to add additional participants to alleviate the limitations discussed in chapter three. It would be of further interest to hear from district lead coaches, a school level coaches, other teachers, and students. Their perspectives and experiences could further the findings of this study.

Lastly, further research on how change approaches shift as implementation moves into year three and beyond would be of interest. In conjunction with this, adoption for ELA will happen again in two more years. Noting what the district has learned with this adoption process, would they approach adoption differently for the next round and/or are they approaching adoption for another content area, such as math, differently based on the lessons they have learned from the ELA adoption.

## **Conclusion**

This qualitative instrumental case study looked at the lived experiences of four educators as they navigated the curriculum adoption and implementation. The research

questions explored the journey of a curriculum from adoption to implementation in one school district, middle school, and ELA classroom, and looked at the experiences of educators regarding the adoption and implementation of the curriculum. Additionally looking at if those experiences affected their perceptions regarding the intended and enacted curriculum. Further still if those experiences were at all influenced using technical and adaptive change approaches. The intention of this study was not to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum itself, but to explore perceptions regarding the implementation of the curriculum to determine best practices for districts and schools to employ during implementation of their chosen curriculum. This study did not aim to set forth a one size fits all approach to implementation, but rather help districts create a sound understanding of the implementation process through technical and adaptive change lenses to measure the impact of the intended and enacted curriculum.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **District Leader Interview Questions**

1. What is your current role at the district? How long have you been in this role?
2. Before moving into district level leadership (principal, assistant principal, instructional coach), what roles did you hold at school level?
3. What was/is the process for choosing a literacy curriculum?
4. What literacy curriculum does your district use? Why was it curriculum chosen?
5. How long has the district been using this curriculum?
6. How did the district inform schools and teachers about the curriculum? How far in advance were they informed that the curriculum was changing?
7. As the point person for curriculum implementation, what was the intended plan for curriculum implementation/rollout? Describe the process including trainings/PD, material distribution, etc.
8. Did you take part in presenting this curriculum change to teachers/coaches/schools? If yes, describe that conversation, PD, staff meeting.
9. What do you think was the initial perception by schools and/or teachers regarding the curriculum implementation? How do you know?
10. Were changes made to accommodate the curriculum? This could include schedule changes, extending class periods, PLC time, etc.
11. How aligned with the intended curriculum have schools and teachers stayed? If they have made changes, why do you think they made those changes?
12. Is there anything about the implementation that you want to tell me that I did not ask?
13. If you could give advice to other districts regarding the implementation of the curriculum, what would it be?

## Appendix B

### School Leader Interview Questions

1. What is your current role at this school? How long have you been in this role?
2. Before moving into leadership (principal, assistant principal, instructional coach), what did you teach?
3. What was your favorite part about teaching your subject?
4. What literacy curriculum are your teachers using?
5. How long have your literacy teachers been using this curriculum?
6. How were you informed about the curriculum by the district? How far in advance did you know that the curriculum was changing?
7. What were your initial thoughts when presented with the curriculum? Why?
8. What was the first thing you did when you got the curriculum? Why?
9. Did you take part in presenting this curriculum change to teachers? If yes, describe that conversation, PD, staff meeting.
10. Did you take part in any trainings around this curriculum? Please describe the process for training around this curriculum. Include professional development, materials you were sent, etc.
11. How involved was your district leadership with this implementation?
12. Were changes made to accommodate the curriculum? Who decided on these changes? What did the changes hope to accomplish or support? This could include schedule changes, extending class periods, PLC time, etc.
13. How aligned with the intended curriculum have your teachers stayed? If they have made changes, why do you think they made those changes?
14. How supported do you, as administration, feel overall regarding the curriculum implementation? Who supports you around the implementation?
15. Is there anything about the implementation that you want to tell me that I did not ask?
16. If you could give advice to district leadership and/or teachers regarding the implementation of the curriculum, what would it be?



## Appendix C

### Teacher Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a teacher? What is your favorite part about teaching?
2. Tell me about the literacy curriculum you use. How long have you used it? What are its strengths? What are weaknesses or areas of concern?
3. What was the process to choose the curriculum? Was there a committee? Were you part of it?
4. What were your initial thoughts when presented with the curriculum? Have participant further explain if needed.
5. What was the messaging around the use of the curriculum from the district? From your school leadership? Did you perceive that as complimentary or contradictory?
6. What are your perceptions regarding how you believe the district intended you to use these materials? Intentions of your school leadership?
7. How do you actually use the curriculum in your classroom? Why did you make those choices?
8. What teaching practices, if any, did you change in response to this curriculum? (Follow-up question depending on answer- Were you told to change? Why did you change practices?)
9. Do you feel supported with implementation of these materials? Why or why not?
10. Does anyone conduct checks around the use of the curriculum? If yes, tell me about those checks. Are there “look-fors” or tools used when conducting these walkthroughs?
11. Did/do you receive coaching around your use of the curriculum? If yes, please describe the process for training around this curriculum. Include professional development, materials you were sent, etc..
12. How involved was your district leadership with this implementation? School leadership?
13. Were changes made to accommodate or modify this curriculum? This could include schedule changes, extending class periods, PLC time, cutting portions of the curriculum, etc.

14. How aligned have you stayed with the curriculum? If you have made changes, why did you make those changes?
15. How supported have you felt to make those changes?
16. How supported do you feel overall regarding the curriculum implementation?
17. Is there anything about the implementation that you want to tell me that I did not ask?
18. If you could give advice to district leadership, school leadership and/or other teachers regarding the curriculum implementation, what would it be?