

## The Impact of a Scripted Reading Program on Teachers' Professional Spirits

Robin Griffith  
East Carolina University

*The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 continues to have a profound effect on education. Not only is it impacting how student success is measured and described, it is also influencing what and how teachers teach. In this age of school reform, teacher accountability, scientifically researched methods, and teacher-proof programs are common terms and are having a powerful effect on teachers and their professional spirits. This phenomenological study examines how four teachers' professional identities and professional spirits were impacted by the mandated implementation of a scripted reading program, Voyager Universal Literacy Systems (Voyager). Internal conflicts experienced by the teachers in this study were caused by a dissonance between their personal beliefs about best practices in reading and the philosophy of the reading program and by the insistence of district and school personnel to implement the program with fidelity. This study seeks to capture the essence of the phenomenon that occurred when these four teachers' professional spirits were compromised as a result of a mandated scripted reading program.*

*"I knew so much about reading and writing, (that when the school district mandated a scripted reading program) it was an insult for them to hand me this book and say, 'Do it this way.' They're not valuing anything that we bring to the situation."* These comments were made by Penny, a veteran second grade teacher in a large school district in the southwest, following the district's decision to implement the scripted reading program, Voyager Universal Literacy Systems (Voyager) with Reading First monies. The U.S. Department of Education's (2007) Institute of Education Sciences describes Voyager as

a core reading program designed to help students learn to read at or above grade level by the end of the third grade. The program uses whole classroom, small group, and independent group settings [and] ... emphasizes regular assessments, with biweekly reviews for struggling students and quarterly assessments for all students. (p. 1)

Developed by Sharon Vaughn, Ed Kame'enui, Deborah Simmons, Roland Good, and Jeri Nowakowski, Voyager targets "the five essential components of reading" and utilizes the Vital Indicators of Progress (VIP), an assessment that is comparable to the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (Voyager Learning, 2008). The Voyager program is not marketed as a "balanced" approach to reading. The phrases "whole and small group instruction" appear on the Voyager website alongside the terms "skills" and "explicit, systematic instruction," indicating that the curriculum is skills-based rather than strategy-based.

While the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 aims to enhance education for children in America, its implications stretch far beyond increasing student achievement. Educators are finding themselves on the receiving end of unintended repercussions of this legislation. This study examined how teachers' professional identities and professional spirits were affected by the implementation of a scripted reading program funded by the Reading First Initiative of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). These are the stories of four highly qualified teachers, their internal conflicts, and their attempts to salvage their professional spirits.

### Literature Review

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the comprehensive school reform act of 2002, as promised, is greatly affecting educational contexts across America. Under Title I of No Child Left Behind, Reading First is “designed to ensure that every child can read on grade level by the end of third grade through the implementation of instructional programs and materials . . . grounded in scientifically based reading research” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 9). While there is no listing of accepted programs for Reading First (Garan, 2005), school districts applying for these funds must select programs that address the five essential components of reading instruction as recommended by the National Reading Panel (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), thereby limiting schools to commercially produced programs with a “very narrow range of acceptable practices and program choices” (Lipson, Mosenthal, Mekkelsen, & Russ, 2004, p. 540). With the acceptance of the Reading First funds, school districts are mandating that teachers implement these reading programs with fidelity, potentially creating dissonance between the teachers’ beliefs about reading instruction and the philosophy of the program. Finding a way to resolve these differences often impacts teachers’ professional identities because they are forced to put aside their beliefs and accept, or at least implement, the philosophy of the mandated program.

#### *Teacher's Professional Identities*

Professional identities are the beliefs, attitudes, and emotions that influence teachers’ behaviors and decisions on a daily basis. These identities are shaped by personal experiences as well as interactions within the greater educational context. Fellow teachers, school administrators, school climate, and society’s view of the teaching profession all influence the professional identities of teachers (Van den Berg, 2002). Since the act of teaching involves interactions between people, the emotional aspect of teachers’ professional spirits is undeniable. Where there is human interaction, there is emotion. The emotional side of teachers’ professional spirit is greatly influenced by the amount of time and energy they invest in their work. Given this great investment of personal capital, teachers’ self-esteem and self-fulfillment are at stake every day, which creates a sense of vulnerability in teachers (Van den Berg, 2002)—a vulnerability that could occur when teachers’ beliefs are disregarded upon implementation of mandated reforms. Educational reform mandates have the potential to impact teachers’ professional identities and, similarly, their self-efficacy.

Teachers’ self-efficacy is also influenced by interactions with the wider educational context. Enderlin-Lampe (2002) notes that “past training, administration, peers, and the community characteristics” (p. 142) influence teachers’ beliefs about their abilities to complete a task. Particularly noteworthy is that teachers’ self-efficacy is influenced by how empowered they feel (Enderlin-Lampe, 2002). When teachers believe that their actions and decisions can positively influence student outcomes, their self-efficacy increases. On the other hand, if they feel their hands are tied by mandates that restrict their ability to make individualized instructional decisions for their students, then their self-efficacy may be compromised.

#### *Highly Qualified Teachers vs. Highly Influential Teachers*

NCLB calls for a “highly qualified teacher” for every child (U. S. Department of Education, 2002). A study conducted by Ruddell (1995) revealed that influential teachers played a crucial role in student achievement, with high achieving students identifying twice as many influential teachers as their lower-achieving counterparts. This finding suggests that it is the teacher who makes a difference, not the instructional program. While NCLB acknowledges the critical role of the classroom teacher, it falls short of identifying characteristics of effective teachers. It simply names highly qualified teachers as those who have a bachelor’s degree, are licensed by the state, and have proven their understanding of the subjects they teach (U. S. Department of Education, 2002). Other researchers (Ruddell, 1992; Ruddell & Ruddell, 1995) have expanded the definition of “highly qualified” to “highly effective” and have identified characteristics of those highly effective teachers.

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Ruddell (1992; Ruddell & Ruddell, 1995) identifies five common characteristics of influential teachers. First, they tend to be energetic, passionate, caring, and flexible. Second, influential teachers are sensitive to individual student's needs and motivations. Along with their energetic, positive dispositions, influential teachers are passionate and enthusiastic about the subjects they teach. In addition, they are concerned with the value of each student as a person. Finally, influential teachers tailor instruction to meet the needs and interests of individual students. NCLB recommends that teachers employ "proven" instructional methods (U.S. Department of Education, 2002); however, Glickman (2003) notes that effective teachers make moment-by-moment teaching decisions based upon the needs of students. Taylor, Pressley, and Pearson (2003) state that successful instruction goes beyond skill-based, rote memorization, and incorporates higher order thinking. Glickman (2003) adds:

Effective teaching is a set of context-driven decisions about teaching. Effective teachers do not, like mindless automatons, review that previous day's lessons, state their objectives, present, demonstrate, model, check for understanding, provide guided practices, and use closure. Instead, what effective teachers do is constantly reflect on their work, observe whether students are learning or not, and then adjust their practice accordingly. (p. 51)

These studies suggest that teachers who are highly effective are those who are empowered to make teaching decisions based on their professional knowledge and the needs of their students. If they are restricted by scripted programs and mandates that require them to teach in a way that does not correlate with their professional belief systems, their professional identities may be compromised.

### ***Teachers' Reactions to Mandated Reform***

Fullan (1991) maintains that teachers' buy-in to curricular change is greatly influenced by their level of participation in that change effort. Hypothetically, teachers who have a venue in which to voice their opinions and influence the decisions feel more empowered and validated and therefore are less resistant to the mandated changes. On the other hand, Turnball (2002) found that teachers support the reform effort only when they receive professional development support, when the administrator supports the reform, and when they are allowed control over classroom implementation.

Teacher buy-in is also influenced by teachers' beliefs about instruction. Understandably, when the ideologies behind the reform effort align with teachers' beliefs, they are more likely to embrace the reform (Datnow & Castellano, 2000). Since the teachers' professional identities are closely tied to the feelings of validation and empowerment, reforms that contradict their beliefs about teaching are more likely to be met with resistance and, in the end, deemed unsuccessful (Datnow & Castellano, 2000). To combat the feelings of dissonance, teachers often ignore the mandate, close their classroom doors, and go about teaching as usual (Datnow & Castellano, 2000; Van den Berg, 2002).

In the face of mandated reform, teachers ultimately have two options: to view the reform as problematic and limiting or to see it as challenging and enriching (Van den Berg, 2002). As previously mentioned, teachers whose views and philosophies align with the ideologies of the mandated program find reason to embrace it. Their "pedagogic identities" are affirmed and strengthened (Enderlin-Lampe, 2002). Some teachers decide that the reform effort is effective and that it makes a difference in student achievements, so in the end, they embrace the changes (Datnow & Castellano, 2000).

The dominant theme in the literature appears to be one of resistance, frustration, and outright opposition to the mandates. Some teachers feel their hands are tied and ultimately acquiesce to the imposed change. Datnow and Castellano (2000) quote a teacher saying, "I do not believe in it (the scripted phonics program) at all, but decided to go with the program" (p. 789). This statement exemplifies the feelings of defeat associated with imposed reform that results in a culture of compliance (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Speigman, 2004). Teachers who are overwhelmed with reforms that contradict their beliefs often adopt a "survival strategy" (Moore, Edwards, Halpin, & George, 2002). They continually seek ways to appease the

administrators while trying to salvage their pedagogic beliefs. Some teachers survive by “accepting” the program, while making significant modifications to the way it is implemented (Datnow & Castellano, 2000; Van den Berg, 2002). They simply change it to make it fit their beliefs. Feelings of frustration emerge when teachers believe the mandated program contradicts their beliefs about “good teaching” (Datnow & Castellano, 2000; Meyer, 2002; Van den Berg, 2002). Other teachers view the reform programs as demeaning and degrading, especially when forced to read from a script (Datnow & Castellano, 2000; Meyer, 2002).

### **Methods**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the effects of a mandated scripted reading program on teachers' professional spirits. A phenomenological study, as defined by Glesne (1999), “focuses on descriptions of how people experience and how they perceive their experiences of the phenomenon under study” (p. 7). In this case, the phenomenon was the mandated implementation of a scripted reading program. The principal research question that guided this study was, “How did a scripted reading program implemented as a byproduct of NCLB affect teachers' professional spirits?” Subsequent questions emerged from this main inquiry: (a) What conflicts exist for teachers who are required to implement a scripted reading program? (b) How do teachers adapt and adjust their teaching methods when a scripted reading program is implemented? and (c) How do these mandated changes affect teachers' views of themselves as professionals?

The participants for this study were four primary-grade teachers in a small city in the southwest. Two of the teachers, Penny and Teresa, taught in the same Title I school, while the other two teachers, Cynthia and Denise, taught in different Title I schools in the same district. Each participant in this study had worked with me in professional contexts and had, on their own accord, informally shared their concerns about, feelings toward, and views about the scripted reading program. Following repeated informal discussions, I decided to conduct in-depth interviews with the four teachers.

Each of these teachers taught in a Title I school and was required to implement the scripted reading program, Voyager Universal Literacy System (Voyager), as part of a Reading First Grant. The teachers were considered “highly qualified” by NCLB standards, which meant that they held a bachelor's degree, were certified by the state, and had demonstrated competency. In addition, these teachers possessed other characteristics that allowed me to deem them “highly qualified.” In my work with these teachers, I observed that they had extensive knowledge of the subject matter, of how children learn, and of their children as individual learners. Three of the four teachers had obtained a Master's degree in literacy and the fourth had taken a number of courses towards an advanced degree.

Since I was interested in telling the teachers' stories, interviews served as the primary data source. In-depth, semistructured interviews (Berg, 2004) were conducted for each teacher in the spring after the teachers had implemented Voyager for seven months. The interviews were one to two hours in length, and the teachers were interviewed individually in a neutral setting, away from their school campuses. Conducting the interviews in a neutral setting was important for two reasons. First, the teachers could speak candidly about their feelings and experiences when the fear of being overheard was removed. Second, the off-campus interviews allowed me to protect the identities of the teachers since they faced possible pressure from school administrators to avoid expressing views that may be in opposition to the views and decisions of the school district. All names and distinguishing characteristics have been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

Even though the interview questions paralleled the research questions, I made a point to not specifically ask the research questions. A consistent interview protocol was followed with the researcher asking probing questions like, “Can you tell me more about that?” “Who was that person?” and “How did you do that?” (see Appendix for interview questions). All interviews were transcribed in their entirety.

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### *Participants*

Penny, a second grade teacher with 15 years of teaching experience, served as the key informant for this study. In addition to answering questions during the interview, Penny provided the researcher with important information about the Voyager program and its implementation in the school district.

Teresa had been teaching for 10 years. During the interview, she told her story of how the scripted program, Voyager, impacted her view of teaching and caused her to seek a teaching position in another district.

Although Denise only had two and a half years of teaching experience, she viewed herself as a professional and felt she was highly qualified to teach children to read because of extensive coursework she received at a nearby university while seeking her Master's degree in literacy.

Cynthia, a teacher of 13 years, told the story of acceptance in the face of imposed change. For Cynthia, her job was to make the most of the situation.

Prior to the implementation of Voyager, all four teachers employed what they identified as a "balanced literacy" approach. They read aloud daily, engaged in shared reading regularly, and provided ample opportunities for independent reading. Guided reading served as the primary means of reading instruction, though comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, and phonics were imbedded in all aspects of reading. Each teacher received weekly or bi-weekly coaching sessions from the campus literacy coaches and attended monthly professional development sessions after school.

### *Data Analysis*

Data for this phenomenological study were analyzed using the steps of bracketing, horizontalization, and clusters of meanings (Creswell, 1998). At the time of the study, the largest school district in our city was undergoing major revisions in its instructional approaches to reading. The school district abandoned a "balanced literacy" approach that had been implemented to various degrees for five years in favor of the unofficially endorsed Reading First program, Voyager Universal Literacy Systems. At that time, many of the classroom teachers whom I knew on a professional level as well as a personal level began to tell me their stories about implementing Voyager. They talked about how difficult it was to implement a program that was so very different from the balanced literacy approach that they had been using. They voiced their frustrations and their anger about being told what and how to teach reading. Upon hearing these stories over and over again, I began to wonder if their voices were being heard and if I might be the one to tell their stories. Knowing that my teaching experiences and beliefs about best practices in literacy mirrored those of the teachers who shared their stories, I intentionally interviewed other teachers who spoke in favor of Voyager. I included one of those teachers in this study.

An important first step was to reflect on my own beliefs about No Child Left Behind, scripted programs, the professional spirit of teachers, and best practices in literacy. I conducted an extensive review of the literature related to No Child Left Behind, the National Reading Panel, and studies related to scripted programs, mandated programs, and teachers' sense of professionalism and professional identities. I reviewed and recorded my interpretations of these policies and studies and the perceived and reported benefits and shortcomings of each (Griffith, 2005). After reviewing these interpretations, a colleague and I met to discuss my perceptions and beliefs and how they might influence our attitudes toward what was happening in our "own backyard." These experiences leading up to this study raised my awareness of any preconceived notions that I had about how a mandated program might impact teachers' attitudes and sense of professionalism. This heightened awareness allowed me to "bracket" the data (Creswell, 1998) and to guard, as much as possible, against transposing my beliefs onto the transcribed data. I continually asked myself, "Is this what I want to hear or is this what she said?" and "Are those beliefs (ideas, thoughts, etc.) hers or mine?"

The second step in data analysis involved reading the four transcribed interviews in their entirety and listing every important statement related to beliefs about highly qualified teachers, beliefs about how children learn, and beliefs about best practices in reading. I also highlighted every statement related to the pros and cons of the Voyager program and statements related to the implementation of the program. This horizontalization step allowed me to break the data into manageable statements related to the research questions (Creswell, 1998).

Upon identifying the important statements in each transcript, I looked for “clusters of meanings” (Creswell, 1998) related to teacher beliefs and conflicts between those beliefs and the Voyager program, as well as conflicts between teachers’ beliefs and the way the program was implemented. The overlapping and repetitive statements related to teacher beliefs centered around what it means to be a highly qualified teacher and how children learn. These four teachers described highly qualified teachers as individuals who knew their students, who knew the reading process, who could continuously monitor student progress formally and informally, and who could differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all learners. The second set of overlapping and repetitive statements related to the conflicts these teachers experienced when asked to implement a scripted reading program. These conflicts included restrictions placed upon the teachers because of the timeline and structure of Voyager and discomfort with the way fidelity to the program was monitored by coaches, school administrators, district personnel, and external evaluators.

## Findings

### *Teacher Beliefs*

Each of the four teachers believed that children learn best when they are active participants in the learning process and when they are engaged in meaningful literacy activities. In addition, the teachers stated that children learn at different paces and in different ways; therefore, teachers must be able to teach the same concept in multiple ways. Similarly, these teachers acknowledged a range of student understandings and needs in every classroom and were adamant that the teacher be able to meet that range of needs regardless of the instructional program being implemented (Glickman, 2003). Teresa stated, *“No matter what program you pick, it’s going to be weak somewhere ... Be willing to go and search and find what else you need ... The teacher has to find the way to bring it to the kids, because all kids learn in a different way.”* For these four teachers, helping students learn to read was the essential task at hand, and they would use whatever tool necessary to get the job done.

Three of the teachers mentioned educational theorists and researchers who impacted their view of reading and teaching in general. They believed in choice (Cunningham & Allington, 1994; Serafini, 2001), scaffolding student learning (Vygotsky, 1978), providing texts on students’ instructional levels (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), and promoting strategic reading (Clay, 1991). The fourth teacher, Cynthia, admitted to *“not being terribly self-confident about teaching reading.”* Though she spoke of the importance of teacher modeling and students working on their instructional level, she said, *“I’m always kind of open minded. Maybe I’m not the expert and that somebody out there knows better than I do. So, maybe there’s nothing wrong with trying their new way.”* Cynthia recognized that she still had questions about reading instruction, but that she could find resources to help her learn more (Eisner, 2002). These varying beliefs about reading influenced the teachers’ perceptions of the Voyager reading program. Some led to extreme internal conflict, while others helped the teachers adapt to the mandated changes.

### *Conflicts*

Though the interview questions were open-ended and did not specifically request information about the conflicts the teachers felt as a result of being asked to implement Voyager, many conflicts emerged from the data. These conflicts consisted of discrepancies between the teachers’ beliefs and the philosophy of the

reading program, issues with the implementation of the program and the insistence upon fidelity, and dissatisfaction with the program's model of professional development. Similar to the teachers in Shelton's (2005) study, "They were constantly pulled back and forth between what they thought they should do because of the curriculum mandates and what they wanted to do because of their own beliefs about teaching and learning" (p. 187). Many of these conflicts had a direct impact on the teachers' professional spirits, including their emotions, their perceptions of themselves as teachers, and their views of teaching as a profession.

Conflicts with the Program. All of the teachers commented on the restrictive nature of the timeline of the program. Penny stated, "[The least rewarding part of teaching is] having to adhere to a certain structure instead of being able to go with the kids ... If something is going really well and we're going down this path but here's the curriculum down this other path, it's really hard for me to let them go too far without bringing them back, to put them back on the path with the curriculum. That's really frustrating."

These time constraints not only impacted the reading portion of the day, but other areas of the curriculum as well. Because the Voyager time was protected from interruption and the prescribed instructional time was insisted upon by district personnel, other areas of the curriculum were often shortchanged or neglected altogether. Cynthia lamented, "*Sometimes you feel like you're spending so much time teaching Voyager that you're missing out on some other things that are also equally important. My writer's workshop time is 20 minutes a day. Now, tell me how I'm supposed to do that. We're always cramming it in and it's like this (snapping fingers). I know I'm not teaching writing effectively in 20 minutes.*"

None of these teachers believed that the reading time wasn't important. They simply wanted more flexibility. Cynthia went on to say, "*There's absolutely nothing during my day that I can plan for myself ... We used to have some really cool (thematic) units and we've had to completely chuck them, not because they don't integrate anywhere into what we're doing, but there is no time in the day to do them. And that's frustrating.*" Graves (2001) acknowledges this type of frustration: "What drains energy the most is when your professional options are reduced, or when decisions are made for you, and you can only react to events instead of shaping them" (p. 21). Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that these teachers' professional energies were being drained because of this lack of autonomy.

The time factor was not the lone criticism of Voyager. The structure and insistence upon fidelity caused these teachers to question how they could possibly meet the range of students' needs if they were required to teach reading with the exact same materials, in the exact same manner to children with varying instructional needs. "Adaptive teaching" (Darling-Hammond, 1996, p. 10) was not an option.

Despite these negative comments, each of the teachers felt there were positive aspects of the program. Some of the teachers liked the direct instruction of phonemes and some liked the graphic organizers used during the whole group time. Cynthia was the strongest supporter because she believed it was working for her students (Datnow & Castellano, 2000). "*Yesterday, we finished the last benchmark and 14 out of 15 (students) are reading 90 words a minute or higher and retelling the story, which puts them on track (on grade level by Voyager standards). And some of the progress they've made has been incredible ... Even if I'm bored with the program, it's new to them and it's working for them.*"

Conflicts with Implementing the Program with Fidelity. Program fidelity carried significant weight in this particular school district. District personnel took numerous steps to ensure the fidelity of the program was maintained, even going so far as to hire external evaluators to monitor the fidelity of the program's implementation. Key players in the implementation process were the Voyager coaches, the school principals, the external evaluators, and the district personnel in charge of the Reading First grant. Classroom visits by these individuals were commonplace in this district. For the teachers, especially in the first year of implementation, these visits sometimes caused discomfort. They talked of Voyager coaches and external evaluators coming into their classrooms with the Voyager manual and a clipboard and "They would be writing, writing, writing." The coaches often reported to the school principal about the teachers' adherence to the script. "Last year, we had to go exactly by the book. Whatever the book says, you have to be on this lesson at this time and our coach was in there and she was taking notes. If we didn't do it exactly like what

was in the book, then she went and told the principal who came to us and said, 'You're not doing it like you're supposed to. You've got to get on board.'" This adherence to the script and the implementation timeline eliminated teachers' "decision-making rights" (Meyer, 2005, p. 105).

Cynthia had a different experience with her Voyager coach. She commented several times about the coach's supportive nature. "[My coach] would come into our rooms if we had a question about things ... she'd come in and model."

Penny commented on the power of the school principal in determining the role of the coach. "This year, I think our principal has said, 'These teachers are doing what they're supposed to do. Your job is not to go in there and write down everything they're doing and come and tattle to me, because I don't want to hear it.' And so, that coach's role has shifted, so it's given us a bit more flexibility."

Throughout the interviews, the teachers commented on how this insisted fidelity was "frustrating," "intimidating," and how it "took the creativity out of teaching." Denise said, "It almost takes that ambition and drive out of you. I almost feel like I don't want to even try any more, because if they don't trust me to do this, then why should I even try to make it better?" Her expertise and knowledge were not recognized or validated by the district personnel (Meyer, 2005), and she was suffering from teacher burnout as a result of imposed helplessness (Van Manen, 2002).

Again, Cynthia's story was different from the rest because she felt that her coach and principal were so supportive and encouraging that the issue of fidelity did not cause as much conflict for her. "I happen to be on a campus where my principal and my coach are so supportive ... They just always made it feel like we were doing the right thing even when we weren't necessarily, because it was so easy to veer from the script."

She went on to explain the positive impact the principal and coach had on her school's willingness to accept the program. "She (the principal) was as up in arms about it as anybody. And then, she came in one day and sat us all down and said, 'It's here. And we have to do it. We're not being given a choice about it. We have to do it, so we're going to do it and we're going to do it well.'" The staff of the school interpreted this principal's comments positively because she did not just stop with the proclamation that they were going to implement the program, but she took steps to support the staff in its implementation. "She's always been really involved ... We have to monitor students' progress weekly and we meet with her once a week to go over our scores. 'What do we need to do about this one? What do we need to do about that one?' ... She's really involved in making plans for kids that are struggling. She just knows what's going on." This principal made it a point to help her teachers feel successful by being an active member of the instructional team (Eisner, 2002) and by providing support for them. As a result, her staff was less resistant to the mandated changes (Turnball, 2002).

### ***The Attack on the Teachers' Professional Spirits***

All of these conflicts impacted the way the teachers viewed their jobs. These teachers described their experiences with teaching the scripted reading program, Voyager, as "miserable," "boring," "unpleasant," and "frustrating." One teacher said she "cried a lot." Another said that she wasn't happy and that it affected her family life. These emotions were closely tied to their professional identities (Van den Berg, 2002).

Each of these teachers very clearly stated what they believed to be characteristics of highly qualified teachers, and based upon the comments they made during their interviews, one could assume that they viewed themselves as highly qualified teachers. They believed they had a lot to offer students. Because of the way the Voyager program was implemented and the way the district personnel presented the program to the teachers, these four perceived it as an attack on their capabilities and competencies as teachers. Penny stated, "Because I knew so much about reading and writing, it was almost like this insult for them to hand me this book and say, 'Do it this way.'" Teresa went on to say, "Sometimes you feel like you could just go get somebody off the street and hand them the manual and they could teach the lesson just fine." These teachers believed the school district was promoting Voyager as a "teacher-proof" program and were greatly insulted by it. The frustration was evident in Denise's comment, "I've heard people say, 'Change is hard.' Well, it's

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more than 'change is hard.' It's so much more than that. It's changing who we are as teachers and what we want to be. And I feel that sometimes they don't even want us there any more unless we see it the same way as them." These teachers were facing a "culture of curricular oppression" (Meyer, 2005) and were finding their professional identities stripped away.

### Assertions

In the face of these mandated changes, the teachers had to find ways to combat these conflicts. They had to find ways to adapt and adjust. Sometimes that meant abandoning or at least temporarily putting aside personal belief systems. At other times, it meant finding a way to keep those beliefs intact while appeasing the "Voyager police" with "more subtle forms of resistance" (Davies Samway & Pease-Alvarez, 2005, p. 152).

For Penny, that meant not sticking as closely to the script as she did the first year: *"I think the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the program isn't going to be as strict as the first year. They don't have time to police everyone in every school. This year, I feel more comfortable because I know the program. I know where I can tweak it. I know what's good and what I can leave out."*

Teresa adapted by making the most of her time. *"I always did what I had to do. I always did Voyager and then I would do my own reading groups. I would manage my time and get it done."* Denise's principal encouraged a similar approach. *"She'd said to us, 'Every child, every day needs to read something on their instructional level.' And she also said, 'Get through the Voyager curriculum quickly so you can fit in other things that you know are good for kids.'"* These teachers' loyalties were with the children and they would do whatever it took to provide the best instruction for them, even if it meant working twice as hard.

These adaptations make it seem as if the teachers were okay with the implementation of the scripted reading program. In fact, they were not. Three of the four teachers talked of ways to flee the situation either by leaving the school, leaving the district, or leaving the teaching profession altogether. Teresa said that a friend told her, *"You're too good to keep doing this."* And her husband told her, *"Do what you've got to do, even if it means finding another job."* These teachers wanted to go where they were valued and where they could retain some autonomy (Ryan, 2004).

Denise was hesitant to leave her teaching post. *"I try to be a very positive person, and I feel like it's taken some of that away from me. But then at the same time I love the kids at my school and I don't want all of the good teachers to give up on them either, because of a program. And so, I've just tried to take it one day at a time."* She still believed in her ability to make a difference in the lives of her students (Enderlin-Lampe, 2002).

Though the purpose of this study was not to determine the effectiveness of the Voyager program, readers may wonder if increasing student achievement trumps the need to maintain the professional spirits of classroom teachers. In order to address this wondering, I considered Cynthia's comment about the success of her students. She stated that because 14 out of 15 students were "on track" she had to acknowledge the effectiveness of the program even if it compromised her sense of autonomy. One might consider the context of this success. The Vital Indicators of Progress (VIP) assessment used to determine if students were "struggling," "emerging," "on track," or "advanced" closely aligned with the program's core components of fluency and alphabets. Improvement on this assessment was to be expected. Upon further investigation, I learned that the research related to the success rate of Voyager is inconclusive. The What Works Clearinghouse report on Voyager (U.S. Department of Education, 2007) states that the Voyager program had a moderate to large effect on alphabets and a small effect on comprehension. There were no studies to support the program's effect on fluency or general reading achievement. An independent impact study available on the Voyager website ([http://www.voyagerlearning.com/ResearchStudyDocuments/Lubbock\\_ULS.pdf](http://www.voyagerlearning.com/ResearchStudyDocuments/Lubbock_ULS.pdf)) reported that after two years of implementation, one school district indicated that "94% of the third grade students achieved proficiency" on the state standardized test. The report did not provide proficiency rates of students

prior to program implementation. When comparing the proficiency rates of the three schools represented in this study, I found that all three showed decreasing or stagnant proficiency rates pre- and post-Voyager (<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/reporting/taksagg/yr0304/bycampus.html>).

Publishing companies continue to tout the effectiveness of their programs but the short- and long-term effects of those programs are often inconclusive (International Reading Association, 2002) and blurred by the complexities of the multitude of factors inherent in the dynamics of a single classroom, school, or district. To that end, the International Reading Association (2002) recommends a shift in focus from “best programs” to “best practices” that are supported by research (see [http://www.reading.org/downloads/positions/ps1055\\_evidence\\_based.pdf](http://www.reading.org/downloads/positions/ps1055_evidence_based.pdf) for more information).

### **Implications**

The teachers in this study are four small islands in the stormy sea of teacher accountability and top-down instructional mandates, yet their stories cause us to think about the broader impact imposed reading programs have on the teaching profession. Their stories cause us to question, “What can be done to salvage teachers’ professional spirits when they lose control of instructional decisions?”

Three of the four teachers in this study were secure in their beliefs about best practices in reading, and because the mandated scripted reading program did not match their beliefs, they were forced to find ways to adapt and adjust. They modified the script when no one was watching and layered other teaching approaches on top of the Voyager program. The remaining teacher, Cynthia, was less confident in her beliefs about best practices in reading and approached the required mandates with more open-mindedness than the other three teachers. She was still seeking answers to her questions about how to best meet the range of needs in her classroom. Though she was not thrilled with all aspects of the program, Cynthia, guided by the support of her principal and literacy coach, found the Voyager program to have some merit because it resulted in positive student achievement. The implications from these findings indicate that scripted reading programs like Voyager may have some value for teachers who are less experienced and less confident in their beliefs about best practices in literacy. This implication must be read with caution, however, because Cynthia’s success and attitude toward the program was strongly impacted by the positive guidance provided by her school principal and literacy coach.

While two of the teachers decided to remain with the school district the following year, the other two fled. Hirsch (2005) reminds us about the importance of teacher empowerment.

When teachers believe that their knowledge of teaching and learning is considered a valuable factor in decision making, they become connected to their schools and districts in powerful ways. This connection can help improve the retention of those teachers in their classrooms and, ultimately, the success of the students they teach. (p. 19)

Given the ultimate goal of NCLB to meet the needs of all children, especially those most at-risk, and given what we know about the important role of the classroom teacher, we must strive to keep highly qualified and highly effective teachers in the classroom. The results of this study indicate that insisting that teachers implement scripted programs with fidelity is forcing our highly effective teachers to abandon their own beliefs about best practices in reading and is having a significant effect on their professional spirits and sense of self-efficacy. The way the fidelity of this program was monitored played a significant role in compromising teachers’ sense of autonomy and their sense of professionalism. If they felt their knowledge was valued, or at least acknowledged, they would have been less resistant to the mandates. Teachers should have a shared role in the decision-making process about HOW to implement reading programs, and rather than mandating that teachers follow the script, they should be allowed flexibility in how and when they use the materials.

Finally, the power and influence of school leadership in helping teachers find ways to adapt, adjust, and find success in implementing mandated reading programs (Lipson et al., 2004) must be recognized. School principals and literacy coaches play a significant role in helping teachers retain their professional spirits when scripted reading programs are mandated. When these leaders are present in the classrooms and are involved in making instructional plans for individual students, they become part of the school team rather than leading from a distance. When teachers feel supported rather than constrained, they are less likely to feel a loss of professional spirit. These teachers had much to say about what has happened to them as professionals and they wanted to be heard. Garan (2002) calls for teachers to make their voices heard and to no longer be silenced by those outside their classroom walls who tell them how they must teach and what programs they must use. School leaders should be the first to listen to those voices.

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*Dr. Robin Griffith is an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at East Carolina University, Greenville, NC. Her research interests include writing in the elementary grades, No Child Left Behind and Teachers' Professional Spirits, and professional development for classroom teachers in the area of early literacy.*

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## Appendix

### Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me about yourself and your teaching experience.
  - a. Number of years as a teacher
  - b. Schools, grade levels, subjects
2. What degrees, special training, or professional development have [you] received?
3. The No Child Left Behind Act calls for a “highly qualified teacher” for every child. In your opinion, what characteristics do highly qualified teachers possess?
4. For you personally, what is the most rewarding part of teaching?
  - a. Can you give me an example of when you experienced that?
  - b. More specifically, what is the most rewarding part of teaching reading?
  - c. Can you give an example of when you have experienced that?
5. For you personally, what is the least rewarding or most challenging part of teaching?
  - a. Again, more specifically, what is the least rewarding part of teaching reading?
  - b. Can you give an example of when you have experienced that?
6. When you were talking about characteristics of highly qualified teachers, you mentioned understanding children. Talk a bit about how you believe children learn.
7. Talk about what you believe are best practices for teaching children.
8. Please talk more specifically about how you believe children learn to read.
9. How did you come to this understanding of how you believe children learn?
  - a. What sources are you drawing upon to make these statements?
  - b. Can you talk about experiences or individuals that have influenced your beliefs?
10. Please talk about your experiences with implementing the scripted reading program, Voyager.
  - a. Daily schedule
  - b. Impact on student achievement
  - c. Feelings/attitudes of teachers, students, parents, administrators
11. How often do you make decisions about reading materials, lesson plans, and teaching approaches?
12. In your opinion, who has impacted the implementation of this program the most?
  - a. You mentioned X, can you talk more about how X’s role impacted you?
    - i. Principal
    - ii. Coach
    - iii. Central Office Personnel
    - iv. External Evaluators
    - v. Peers

Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience?