Curriculum implementation: A phenomenological study of a reading curriculum adoption and power relationships in one school district

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Curriculum Implementation: A Phenomenological Study of a Reading Curriculum Adoption and Power Relationships in One School District

by

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Dissertation

Submitted to the College of Educational Leadership and Counseling

Eastern Michigan University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Educational Leadership

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November 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2017

Ypsilanti, Michigan
Abstract

Understanding the underlying issues that drive the success or failure of curriculum enactments is an important step in redesigning school reform efforts. This paper describes a phenomenological study of five elementary teachers as they participated in the selection and enactment of a new reading curriculum for a period of two and a half years. Steven Searle’s theory on status functions and the role that binding operational decisions and language play within social systems describes the process by which attenuating mythologies arise and ultimately threaten the viability of curriculum initiatives. The connection between status functions, the leaders that declare them and maintain status function relationships, and the social categorization processes that define roles within the organization are examined. This research suggests defensive bias and defensive mythology are expressions of interests and, as such, are evidence of the exercise of power and illustrate the context-transcending nature of power. Initiatives such as curriculum enactments are often under threat within school organizations due to these processes. Attenuating mythologies generated by low-status members of the organization persist well after leaders leave their roles within the organization and become a meaningful narrative that is difficult, if not impossible, to debunk.
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CHAPTER 1: Social Influence in School Organizations

Introduction

Teachers’ values and attitudes are key factors in the success or failure of curriculum enactments (Kirk & McDonald, 2001). Moreover, school districts and school administrators are increasingly facing external pressures to change. Often, change is attempted in organizations with intense environments with levels of high pressure to show improved student achievement (Mette & Scribner, 2014). What passed for acceptable in the past is no longer acceptable today. Schools react in a variety ways when encountering these pressures. Increases in the stringency of requirements, such as toughening requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress, do not necessarily lead to improvement and can have the opposite effect (Wong, Wing, & Martin, 2016). For school organizations, the pressure administrators feel to enact change to improve scores may not lead to the shaping of teachers’ attitudes and values in ways that support administrative goals.

For schools that are at risk of being labeled as failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress and/or are subject to local pressures to succeed, these changes include altering their curriculum to match more rigorous standards, such as with the newly adopted Common Core curriculum designed to ramp up expectations and produce students who are college ready rather than simply college eligible. Changes to curriculum can be costly (Jerald, 2006), and these changes are widespread, so curriculum implementation is an area that is worthy of study. Relationships surrounding implementation often center on conflicting interests:

As programs are disseminated, the desire to maintain strict adherence and fidelity (primarily held by program developers) is often countered by a desire to adapt, alter and reinvent programs (primarily held by program providers). These conflicting interests
have created a tension that, as yet, remains unresolved. (Dusenbury, Brannnigan, Falco, & Hansen, 2003, p. 251)

Understanding the nature of these conflicts and the dynamics of power relationships embedded within them should lead to insights into how leadership can more effectively guide curriculum implementation. It is important to study the tension that exists between those who have been responsible for the decision to implement a new curriculum initiative and have designed the methods by which it will be taught and those who feel the pressure to change their own practices.

**Statement of the Problem**

Billions of dollars are spent every year on curriculum reforms that are short-lived and ineffective. For instance, Reading First, a billion dollar per year program enacted with the goal of ensuring that every child would be a proficient reader by the end of third grade, failed to produce statistically significant improvements in the reading comprehension skills of students in first, second, and third grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). In fact, curriculum initiatives at all levels are often short-lived or fail to produce the expected results. The relationship between policy, practice, teacher beliefs, classroom instruction, and student achievement is complex and often leads to unsuccessful enactments (McLaughlin, 1987; Sloan, 2009). Perceptions held by district stakeholders during adoption and enactment can also threaten reform efforts (Lorsbach, 2008). It is important to better understand the nature of these relationships and why curriculum reforms fail to have long-lasting impacts on student achievement so that these resources can be utilized more effectively and have a positive impact on student performance. This phenomenological study focused on one particular attempt at curriculum reform and examined the teachers’ experiences, from the early stage of adoption through the first year of enactment.
Power is about changing behavior and influencing outcomes, but it is also a story of the shaping of values, of competing interests and preferences, and of overcoming obstacles and prejudices (Lukes, 2005). It involves control and resistance. The aim of this research was to shed light on how these relationships lead to successful implementations and on how they can erect barriers to meaningful change in instructional practices.

The Implementation of the Reader’s Workshop at Grayhill Community Schools

Grayhill Community Schools is a school district that consists of approximately 5,000 students in southeastern Michigan. The district includes suburban neighborhoods and is located just outside of a larger, more urban city that is anchored by a major public university. The district surrounds a smaller city and four outlying townships where agriculture is the main industry. The district consistently scores above state averages in all academic measures, and the high school is listed as one of the 500 best secondary schools in the nation.

In the fall of 2011, the district began the process of implementing a new reading curriculum for all kindergarten through eighth grade classrooms. The implementation was targeted at all three K-3 elementary schools, the fourth and fifth grade intermediate elementary school, and the middle school. It was the first attempt in over fifteen years to formally implement a reading curriculum district-wide. Prior to this attempt at implementation, teachers, working independently or in teams, determined the reading instructional practices. Reading instruction looked very different across classrooms and grade levels.

The new reading curriculum adopted by the district was based on Lucy Calkins’ *Units of Study for Teaching Reading* Reader’s Workshop. The curriculum consists of several units (or books) that included an extended scope and sequence of instruction. There are four units of study in seven volumes. These units are titled Building a Reading Life, Navigating Nonfiction,
Following Character into Meaning, and Tackling Complex Texts: Historical Fiction in Book Clubs. Training was provided for teachers who agreed to spend four days of their summer recess participating in professional development classes taught by representatives of curriculum publishers. However, the majority of the teachers did not attend the training. Professional development and school improvement activities throughout the year were designed to support implementation plans. The initial implementation plan included the following elements:

1. Classroom teachers were required to use the Fountas and Pinnell reading assessment three times a year for all students to determine each child’s independent reading level. This was a departure from past practice in that the district leadership determined the assessment that was used (a decision that teachers previously made), and it required teachers to assess reading using running records for the first time. In addition, teachers had to provide evidence that the assessment data were being used to make instructional decisions.

2. Teachers were required to teach strategies and lessons from the Reader’s Workshop Units of Study, to use teaching points and mini-lessons developed by the curriculum council, and to follow a monthly curriculum calendar.

3. Each student was to spend at least 45 minutes per day independently reading at her/his determined independent reading level (the text level at which they can correctly read at least 98% of the words correctly and answer comprehension questions with at least 80% accuracy). Students were also instructed to maintain a reading journal to respond in writing to teacher prompts and also maintain a reading log to track the titles and pages they were reading.
4. Teachers were to set aside part of the daily workshop lesson to confer with students individually and to track their meetings by maintaining a log that would document that every student met with the teacher at least once a week.

5. Teachers were required to submit assessment data to the assistant superintendent of instruction three times a year.

6. Each teacher was required to have a classroom library or to use each school literacy libraries and media centers in order to ensure that every student was reading texts at an appropriate level on a daily basis.

The implementation of the new reading curriculum was a radical departure from prior practice and represented a significant change in how teachers were to provide instruction and in regard to who exercised the decision-making power on how teachers were allowed to teach. It was the first time that a central authority was dictating how reading should be taught across the district. The reader’s workshop format requires a different approach to classroom organization, assessment, and teacher pedagogy. To many, reading instruction was not a formal part of the instructional day, especially at the upper elementary and middle school levels. The majority of students in the district have traditionally performed above grade level expectations in reading, as measured by local and state level assessments. However, the major philosophical shift with district leadership focused on growth for students at all levels, even those who are performing well. The result of this shift was an increase in performance expectations.

The Purpose of the Study
Successful leaders are judged according to the extent to which they can change organizations in a way that improves the performance of the organization and meets goals set forth by those in power, including the community at large (Michigan State Board of Education, 2003). Schools are primarily service organizations that rely heavily on the interaction of teachers and students in order to meet goals and expectations. Effective change is highly dependent on changing the behavior of instructional staff. According to MDE (2003), districts must ensure that curriculum is aligned across the district:

Schools will measure their work toward curriculum alignment in the school and across the district. Attention will be paid to the local curriculum standards for learning, problem solving, and decision-making to give students the tools to embrace the information age. (www.michigan.gov/documents/mde/Ed:YES_Revised_4-17-03_188029_7.pdf).

Ultimately, getting individuals and groups of people to behave in a way that is desired by leadership and in a way that they would not behave under normal circumstances is an exercise of power. Understanding how power is used, how it is perceived, and how norms and values are shaped in the exercise of power can lead to more effective and accepted ways for leadership to promote desired changes. Schools provide a unique and interesting opportunity to examine these concepts and power relationships through the context of curriculum implementation—a phenomena that the success or failure of, which is a high-stakes undertaking for leadership, is highly dependent on changes in subordinate behavior and can often be emotionally charged. How teachers perceive the ways in which they are subjected to power can have an effect on how motivated and faithful they will be in terms of changing the way they teach students. A deeper understanding of how district leadership attempts to shape the values and norms of teachers and to control the premises of implementation decisions may lead to more effective strategies for bringing about needed change. The purpose of this study is to examine these power relationships
in depth in order to obtain a greater understanding of how leaders can become more effective in the school setting when implementing new curricular initiatives.

In their review of research on enactment fidelity, Dusenbury et al. (2003) gave four reasons as to why an investigation of enactment fidelity is important. First, when there is a failure to implement a curriculum faithfully, the failure can be mistakenly attributed to the “conceptual or methodological underpinnings” (p. 239) of the particular curriculum and other factors. Second, research on fidelity often helps explain why innovations fail or succeed. If enactments fail due to issues with dosage or the quality of the intervention, this information would be of extreme importance to practitioners and school leaders. Third, “an assessment of fidelity of implementation allows researchers to identify what has been changed in a program and how changes impact outcomes” (p. 240). Identifying any possible connection between enactment fidelity, changes in practice and possible outcomes should be helpful in guiding future implementations. These variable outcomes include attitudes and beliefs, adding that understanding fidelity allows for an understanding of how it moderates these effects and allows for the ability to guide refinements. Dusenbury et al. state, “Finally, fidelity of implementation reveals important information about the feasibility of an intervention—how likely the intervention can and will be implemented with fidelity” (p. 240). In other words, if fidelity is hard to achieve in practice, it is fairly safe to assume that the intervention chosen has low levels of feasibility overall. Dusenbury et al. (2004) suggest that programs that fail to produce positive effects may have to be altered or redesigned altogether.

Curriculum implementation is a significant aspect of traditional public schools in Michigan. The quality of schools and school personnel can be and often is measured by the capacity for change teachers and administrators create and how innovative and cutting edge they
are in their approaches to teaching children. Moreover, increased pressure from outside has led to an increase in the intensity in the working conditions of teachers (Ransford, Greenburg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobsen, 2009). Schools are evaluated based on the systems and methods with which they employ strategies to implement curricula. Districts are pressured by the state, local communities, and agents within their organizations to prove that they are innovative and effective in their approach to curriculum design. School leadership is under pressure to assure that all instructional staff members adhere to the curriculum that is being implemented. This pressure is in some part derived from the understanding that teachers’ assessment of administrative knowledge and level of support has an impact on teachers’ perceptions of the quality of implementation (Ransford et al., 2009). In other words, they have the power to resist change. Therefore, many districts turn to highly organized and sophisticated protocols toward curriculum implementation that include the control of premises, resources, and teacher attitudes as well as attempting to shape the values of teachers in order to promote greater buy-in and implementation fidelity, which is assumed to lead to greater strides in student achievement as well as earning a certain amount of leadership cache for administrators. With teacher salaries and benefits usually fixed and secured by collective bargaining agreements and tenure regulations, the use of leadership skills to affect change and fidelity in school organizations has become increasingly important. Ultimately, this is a story of power, how it is exercised, and how it shapes behavior in and out of the classroom.

In general, curriculum implementation is an attempt to change teacher behavior on behalf of the school leadership. French and Raven (1966) defined psychological change as “changes in behavior, opinions, attitudes, goals, needs, values and all other aspects of a person’s psychological field” (p. 151). Change is conceptualized in terms of psychological forces when
studying social influence and bases of power. Social influence and power can be thought of as the influence on a person produced by a social agent, which could be a person, a group, or part of a group. Dusenbury et al. (2003) noted that as programs are disseminated: “The desire to maintain strict adherence and fidelity (primarily held by program developers) is often countered by a desire to adapt, alter and reinvent programs (primarily held by program providers)” (p. 251). Program developers often have a more detailed or comprehensive understanding of the critical elements of the curriculum; therefore, they may fear that those critical elements may be changed or excluded if the curriculum is adapted. Program providers, on the other hand, fear that strict adherence may fail to meet the needs of their students. The result of this conflict in interests is tension between the two parties, and understanding the power relationships created by the desire to resolve this tension is an important aspect of this study.

It is important to investigate teachers’ perceptions of the motives and methods with which school leaders attempt to influence how teachers go about their duties and how they teach students. The basic assumption is that decisions that are made by what teachers perceive as individuals or groups that do not have the necessary expertise or the capacity to share the risks of poor decisions are not quality decisions and, by consequence, should not necessarily be followed as intently or professionally to achieve success. According to Dusenbury et al. (2003), “Implementation ultimately depends on the receptivity of the sponsoring organization” (p. 250). In addition, implementing a new curriculum may not be in their best interest or match their preferences. The desire to manipulate and control outcomes is often a two-way street.

Both leadership and teachers hold values that shape their understanding of power relationships as well as their behavior and attitudes. Lukes (2005) description of third dimensional power is grounded in the idea that the goal of those in power is to shape the values
and desires of subordinates in order to secure compliance. Lukes (2005) explained that the shaping of values can occur consciously or unconsciously. The shaping of values and desires can lead to behavior on the part of subordinates that may not benefit them (such as changing teaching practices) but that they perform without understanding such an outcome. A deeper understanding of these values, including how they are shaped and how they can be controlled would eventually help those seeking to reach goals, such as implementation fidelity, be more successful. Also, a deeper understanding of the values of those who are subjected to the exercise of power could lead to better strategies when attempting to align goals for both leadership and subordinates alike.

Research Questions

The guiding research questions were written so that the focus of this study would be seen through the lens of social interactions. Specifically, these interactions include the perceptions of the roles teachers constructed for themselves during these social interactions and their perceptions of the roles of others in the organization during these same interactions. Finally, the corresponding examination of the values and norms that emerged from these social interactions focused on the role of social influence and the exercise of social power and their relation to these emergent values.

Guiding Research Questions

- How do teachers describe the roles of others during the process of adoption and enactment?
- How do teachers make sense of their role in the process of adopting and enacting a new reading curriculum?
• What are the shared values and norms that shape the underlying structure of social influence during the implementation of a new reading curriculum?

Table 1

*Key Concepts Relevant to This Study.*

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<th>Key Concepts</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Enactment Fidelity</strong></td>
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<td>Teacher Enthusiasm</td>
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<td>Dosage</td>
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<td>Program Adherence, Differentiation, and Instruction</td>
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**Power and Social Influence**

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<td>Legitimate Authority (charisma, traditional, rule of law)</td>
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<td>Control of Agendas, Resources, Processes, and Boundaries</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
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<td>Legitimate Authority</td>
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<td>Resistance and Attraction</td>
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<td>Power as Potential</td>
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<td>Power as Capacity</td>
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<td>Observed and Unobserved Exercise of Power</td>
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<td>Power as Influence on Social Systems</td>
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<td>Social and Institutional Facts</td>
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<td>Strength and Range of Power</td>
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**Interests**

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Definitions of Relevant Terms

- *Curriculum Implementation*: The processes and practices by which a new curriculum is delivered to students by instructional staff in a school setting.

- *Decision Premises*: Ends that are preferred or desirable for an organization and that clearly explain what is acceptable and what is unacceptable.

- *Dose*: The amount of a curricular program delivered by teachers or the amount of the content received by students (Dusenbury et al., 2003).

- *Enactment/Implementation Fidelity*: The delivery of instruction according to the instated design (Protherone, 2008). It includes the extent to which an organization implements an intervention, curriculum, innovation, or program as intended by the developers (Pence, 2008). It is also the degree to which program implementers deliver the program as intended by the developers (Ransford et al., 2009, p. 512).

- *Influence*: Exists when an agent causes a change in the course of action without resorting to tacit or overt threats. Includes inducement, encouragement, and/or persuasion.

- *Informal Organizations*: Organizations based upon friendship groups or unplanned social interactions that exist alongside formal organizations (Morgan, 2006, p. 35).

- *Legitimacy*: The ability to administer certain feelings of obligation or the notion of responsibility to another.

- *Power*: A social agent’s influence on a person; the agent can be another person, a role, a norm, a group, or part of a group (French & Raven, 1966).

- *Program Adherence*: The strict adherence to the methods that conform to the design of the curriculum and theoretical guidelines (Dusenbury et al., 2003).
• **Program Differentiation:** How apparent the features of the curriculum are in everyday instruction (Pence, Justice, & Wiggins, 2008). The degree to which elements that would distinguish one type of program from another are present or absent (Dusenbury et al., 2003, p. 240).

• **Psychological Change:** Changes in behavior, opinions, attitudes, goals, needs, values, and all other aspects of a person’s psychological field (French & Raven, 1966).

• **Reader’s Workshop:** A reading curriculum and delivery model that requires frequent assessment of students’ independent reading levels, guided practice in small groups, individual student reading at independent reading levels, and units of study by genre that include specific instructional strategies.

• **Shared Norms:** Customary rules that govern behavior in groups and societies.

• **Shared Values:** Explicit or implicit fundamental beliefs, concepts, or principles that underlie the culture of an organization and that guide the decisions and behavior of its employees, management, and members.

• **Social Facts:** Manners of acting, thinking, and feeling that are external to the individual. These manners have coercive power by virtue of that which they exercise control over him (Durkheim, 1982).

• **Social Influence:** When a social agent (O), be it a person, a group, a norm, or a rule, or part of a group exerts power on a system (a), (French & Raven, 1966).

**Delimitations**

The following delimitations are imposed by the nature of the study.

1. This study is not designed to investigate the process of curriculum adoption or the process of curriculum implementation. Its focus is on the exercise of power and the
relationship between power and social influence in the context of the shared experience of implementing a new reading curriculum by elementary teachers and school leadership in one school district.

2. This study was not designed to investigate the exercise or perceptions of social influence and power in the district as a whole. Instead, it focuses on the phenomenon of the implementation of a new reading curriculum at the elementary level. However, participants’ shared experience of participating in this implementation may lead to an understanding of power and influence in a broader context.

3. This study was conducted in a relatively short period of time. Therefore, it is limited by the time span in which it took place.

4. This study is limited by the data collected from Grayhill-area schools and those who were interviewed. To the extent that these data are incomplete or inaccurate, the validity of the study will be limited.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is unique in that it examines curriculum implementation in a new way. Changing teacher behavior and shifting teacher attitudes are often discussed in the field of leadership with a particular focus on the benefits of referent leadership skills, imploring leaders to be perceived as partners and as identifiable to teachers. However, certain aspects of implementation have been overlooked. The methods that influence behavior and the ways control is exercised are complex on both sides. Looking at social influence through these lenses that are regularly applied to other types of organizations and society in general and applying them to curriculum implementation will hopefully lead to benefits for instructional leaders. These include more effective ways to evaluate or assess school cultures to plan for effective
methods of introducing and implementing curriculum, especially as we face the prospect of switching to the new Common Core Standards. For elementary classrooms, these new standards will mandate tougher criteria on which schools will be evaluated and will result in a heightened focus on nonfiction instruction. The state has upped the ante by increasing cut-off scores for the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) and by mandating value-added measures for teacher and principal evaluation. In addition, understanding teacher perceptions and attitudes toward leadership when being required to switch to a new curriculum will hopefully help guide leaders to avoid pitfalls and mistakes that can lead to barriers to fidelity. Leadership will also be able to identify what bases of power are perceived as positive when deciding what actions to take during an implementation. Finally, leaders can benefit by gaining insight regarding what shapes the values norms of their respective organizations, identifying the desired values of those they bring into their organizations, and setting the stage for successful implementations.

Chapter 2 includes a discussion of the key pieces of literature used to frame this study. It addresses implementation fidelity, the nature of power in organizations, and the relationship of power and interests in evaluating the significance of outcomes.
CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides a description of how implementation fidelity is described in the literature, including the key components that must be present to establish that a curriculum implementation is successfully put into place. Thereafter, a description of French and Raven’s five bases of social power along with a discussion of Gareth Morgan’s (2006) concept of power in organizations. Finally, Steven Lukes’ (2005) three-dimensional view of power is presented along with his description of the different classifications of power. In Power: A Radical View, Lukes (2005) provides a conceptual map by which power can be categorized and how the significance of outcomes can be measured by understanding agents’ interests and preferences. All of these concepts will be framed as applicable to the school environment.

Enactment Fidelity

The foundation of all curriculum initiatives attempted in school organizations is the concept of implementation fidelity. Regardless of the financial and other resources used and the actions taken to bring new curricula to the classroom, if the teachers are not implementing the initiatives, then the effort will certainly fail. Implementation fidelity is defined as the delivery of instruction according to its design (Protheroe, 2008, p. 38) and includes the extent to which teachers implement an intervention, curriculum, innovation, or program as intended by the developers.

Protheroe identified three ways that fidelity of implementation (FOI) can be categorized. The first is simply identifying what it is to be taught. This encompasses the entire curriculum, including materials, scope and sequence, assessments, and resource materials. The second is
when the curriculum is to be taught. For successful implementation, staff must also show fidelity to pacing guides, curriculum maps, and assessment timetables. Finally, the third way to categorize fidelity is according to how a curriculum is to be taught. Pence (2008) described three similar aspects of implementation fidelity. These include program differentiation (how apparent the features of the curriculum are in everyday instruction), program adherence (the extent to which lessons are delivered as described in the teachers’ manuals), and quality of delivery (how prepared and enthusiastic the teachers are when implementing the program). Program adherence on the surface encompasses the when and what of Protheroe’s aspects of FOI. Pence acknowledges that the extent to which the curriculum is evident and the level of teacher enthusiasm (buy-in) are also indicators of FOI and are important to take into consideration when assessing the effectiveness of an implementation. There is no formal measure of implementation fidelity in my research because this is a qualitative study, but implementation fidelity as related to teacher enthusiasm, attitudes, and the ability to meet program requirements is investigated. Implementation fidelity is a significant outcome and is the basis of leadership’s attempts to influence the system in which teachers are going to be either positively or negatively moved. It may be possible to gain valuable insights into how teachers’ attitudes toward fidelity are being shaped in relation to perceived power sources when framing fidelity using these three concepts.

In their summary of research in the area of curriculum implementation, Dusenbury et al. (2003) identified five areas of implementation fidelity common to most researchers. One area is program adherence, which is the strict adherence to the methods that conform to the design of the curriculum. The second area, completeness or dosage, is described as the amount of the program delivered by teachers or as the amount of the content received by students. The third area, the quality of the program delivery, refers to the way in which a teacher implements the
program. Finally, there is the *degree* to which participants are involved in the curriculum and program differentiation.

In order to obtain some understanding of how teachers are adhering to the program, Dusenbury et al. (2003) suggested that it is first important to identify the critical elements of the curriculum and to separate those from the more non-essential elements. Therefore, they defined program adherence as the extent to which these critical elements are in practice in the classroom (p. 241). In Chapter 1, I describe the essential elements of the Reader’s Workshop curriculum as determined by the district reading council and the assistant superintendent of instructional Services. The identification of these essential elements and teacher attitudes toward putting them into practice is important, as it allows for a better understanding of power relationships during the implementation.

Dusenbury et al. (2003) also described the concept of dosage and the role it plays in implementation fidelity. As they remarked, in most research, the question of dosage is not a concern because the “failure to deliver a program may be rare in situations where programs are controlled by researchers and delivered by paid personnel” (p. 241). However, as is the case in this study, non-research personnel implementing the program heighten the importance of considering dosage when assessing fidelity. Self-reporting can be suspect because the perceived pressure to perform may result in teachers’ over-estimation of the time they spend teaching the curriculum. Dusenbury et al. (2003) recommended including self-reports, direct observation, and attendance data when gauging the extent to which teachers administer or students receive the curriculum. During data collection, teachers’ feelings and self-assessment of dosage can be important in understanding their overall feelings and attitudes toward the curriculum and the ways leadership expects them to comply.
Durkheim, Social Facts, and Coercion

The exertion of social power is often attributed to the acts of one person, such as a leader or a group of people endowed with certain capacities to change the behavior of others. There are, however, other sources of power that are not attributed to one person or a group of people. Referred to in the literature as social facts, these belief systems or meanings are the result of collective thinking and are considered entities unto themselves that are worthy of study and analysis. Social facts exist within the social realm and are not the product of individual consciousness. Philosopher Emile Durkheim (1982) proposed that social facts, i.e. meanings created as an effect of human actions or agency, exist outside individual consciousness. He suggested that these facts, which derive from collective social language, have the ability to coerce individuals into acting in certain ways and believed that these rules, beliefs, laws, and status roles are external and not the products of those currently living. Instead, they are facts that exist as products of collective thinking and acting. As such, they can constrain and exert influence over individuals and systems. They emerge only in the context of collectivity. Steven Lukes commented that Durkheim established that “realities exist external to the individual, that are as definite and substantial as those of the psychologist or biologist” (Lukes, 2007, p. 197).

Durkheim drew a distinction between what he proposed as social facts and biological or psychological phenomena. Social facts are clearly determined and separated from other forms of subject matter found in science due to distinct characteristics (Durkheim, 1982). Lukes (2007) commented that Durkheim’s goal for establishing social facts and social phenomena as institutions was to establish the possibility to scientifically identify facts, so that social researchers can locate and study them:
Here then, is a category of facts with very distinctive characteristics: it consists of ways of acting, thinking, and feeling external to the individual, and endowed with the power of coercion, by reason of which they control him. These ways of thinking could not be confused with biological phenomena, since they consist of representations and of actions; nor with psychological phenomena, which exist only in the consciousness of the individual, or through it. They constitute thus a new variety of phenomena; and it is exclusively to them that the term “social” ought to be applied. (Durkheim, 1994, p. 439)

The source of social facts can exist on many levels, from society in general to organizations in which collectivity is present. They can include social institutions as well as social activities. Since they are not derived from an individual and exist within a broader social context, social facts are enduring and survive the addition or subtraction of individuals from a social setting:

And this term fits them quite well, for it is clear that, since their source is not the individual, their substratum can be no more than society, either the political society as a whole or some of the one particle groups it includes, such as religious denominations, political, literary, or occupational organizations, etc. (Durkheim, 1994, p. 439)

Why are social facts important for study? Durkheim believed that they were things unto themselves and, as such, could be studied by examining their characteristics. As Durkheim (1982) stated:

Human societies present a new phenomenon of a special nature, which consists in the fact that certain ways of acting are imposed, or at least suggested from outside the individual and are added on to his own nature: such is the character of the ‘institutions’
These characteristics are often manifested in the form of constraints and control exerted on individuals. They can exert control over individuals’ beliefs, behavior, and perceptions and can pressure individuals to act in certain ways:

Thus there are ways of acting, thinking and feeling which possess the remarkable property of existing outside the consciousness of the individual. Not only are these types of behaviour and thinking external to the individual, but they are endued with a compelling and coercive power by virtue of which, whether he wishes it or not, they impose themselves upon him. Undoubtedly when I conform to them of my own free will, this coercion is not felt or felt hardly at all, since it is unnecessary. (Durkheim, 1982, p. 52)

According to Durkheim (1994), proof of the power of constraint manifests when an individual tries to resist, although he asserted that the constraints are hardly noticed when conformity is intentional. When an individual resists, the coercive power of social facts can be felt, even if successful in the attempt to resist. Identifying whether or not social facts are sanctioned is a way to identify them, in part because of their non-material nature. Social facts can include beliefs, practices, institutions, laws, and, most importantly for this study, roles individuals play in social systems.

Even when in fact I can struggle free from these rules and successfully break them, it is never without being forced to fight against them. Even if in the end they are overcome, they make their constraining power sufficiently felt in the resistance that they afford.

There is no innovator, even a fortunate one, whose ventures do not encounter opposition
of this kind. Here, then, is a category of facts which present very special characteristics: they consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him.

(Durkheim, 1982, p. 57)

Morgan’s Power in Organizations

Durkheim’s theories about social facts and their influence over individuals are an important beginning in framing social influence over the individual by the organization. To look deeper into the relationship of power and how it is accrued and exercised in organizations that have competing interests, especially organizations that have a pluralist or radical bend, it is valuable to examine the phenomenon of this curriculum implementation through the lens of Morgan’s description of how power can be viewed in organizations. As Morgan (2006) noted, “Sources of power are rich and varied, providing those who wish to wheel and deal in the pursuit of their interests with many ways of doing so” (p. 166). Morgan provided a framework that can offer further clarification of the relationships of power in Woodview-area schools and learn the ways in which members attempt to influence how and what curriculum is taught.

Formal authority is a form of legitimate power that results when people respect the customs and practices associated with assigning power based on roles within the organization. As Morgan (2006) explained, “It arises when people recognize that a person has a right to rule some area of human life and that it is their duty to obey” (p. 167). Such authority can be awarded through bureaucratic means as leaders navigate their way up the hierarchy or earn it through prior accomplishments such as in the military. Formal authority can be bestowed as a birthright, such as in monarchies, or even through charismatic leadership, such as in politics. In school applications, formal authority is typically associated with the title one holds. People change their
behavior based on the position one holds in an organization. Morgan identified three characteristics that underpin legitimate authority: charisma, tradition, and the rule of law.

Charismatic authority occurs when teachers recognize and respect special qualities held by individuals and believe that those qualities give the individuals the right to make decisions and act on their behalf. This can be the pedigree held by a school leader or teacher, including characteristics such as experience, level of social status or acceptance, and educational level. Traditional authority arises when “people respect the customs and practices of the past and vest authority in those who symbolize and embody these traditional values” (Morgan, 2006, p. 167). Monarchs ascend to power by these means, and perhaps traditional authority is not very applicable in the school setting. Leaders who wield rational-legal authority obtain their power through procedural means; in the school setting, this involves meriting authority through professional or technical qualifications.

Controlling resources, financial or otherwise, is another method that individuals employ to exercise power in organizations. The control of scarce resources, directly linked to French and Raven’s reward and coercive bases of power, corresponds with the reciprocal relationship between having the ability to control resources—namely, money—and choosing who receives and who loses resources in the organization. Although money is often cited as the most important resource (since it can be converted into other forms of resources), skills, materials, and personnel are also scarce resources that can be used for leverage. In the curricular setting, this is often reflected in the individual’s or committee’s ability to provide material and financial support for teaching and professional development and, with it, the status that one can incur as a result of having access to these resources. It also can include the funding of personal initiatives and the approval of grants. Status can be substantial motivator, and the teacher who earns the right to
pilot a laptop program or receives an itouch portable lab usually is the one counted on to behave in a way that conforms to the wishes of those who award the resources. As Morgan (2006) noted, “It is the ability to increase or decrease this flow of funds that gives power” (p. 169).

Rules and regulations can also be created and invoked as a source to accomplish the exercise of power. Often, rules and regulations are seen as a way to make processes more efficient and productive. From another point of view, their creation and enacting can be perceived as an exercise of power and control. School leadership can create and enforce regulations that promote the agenda of implementing the curriculum in an attempt to minimize resistance and compel reluctant teachers to follow along.

Morgan also proposed that those who control decision processes also have power. He described three separate but interrelated elements of decision processes. The first element is the control of decision premises, or controlling the foundation of decision-making. This allows for the prevention of certain decisions from ever coming to the table as well as fostering the creation of certain decision-making opportunities. The school leadership can do this by writing and enforcing the policies surrounding the curriculum implementation and by setting agendas. The process employed can create the environment in which only certain types of decisions can be made and prevent other possible decision opportunities from ever existing in the first place. One could argue that this is a form of legitimate power or expert power since the subordinates may submit to either the positional power of the curriculum director to set the policy or to the perception that he or she is an expert and therefore the policy should not be questioned. Second, control over decision-making processes, which is usually more visible than controlling premises, is often a means to exert power:
How should a decision be made? Who should be involved? When will the decision be made? By determining whether a decision can be taken and then reported to appropriate quarters, whether it must go before a committee and which committee, whether it must be reported by a full report, whether it will appear in order on an agenda, and even whether the decision should be discussed at the end or beginning of a meeting, a manager can have a considerable impact on decision outcomes. (Morgan, 2006, pp. 173-174).

School leaders can control how decisions are made as well as who is involved in the decision-making process. As visible as their attempts at control may or may not be, they no doubt have an effect on the perceptions of the teachers who are charged with implementing the results of these decisions and perhaps shape their attitudes toward the implementation.

The third element associated with the control of decision processes pertains to influencing the issues and objectives to be addressed and the criteria by which evaluations will be made. Morgan (2006) believes that individuals can add to their power by shaping issues and objectives through preparing reports and contributing to the discussion on which the decision will be based:

By emphasizing the importance of particular restraints, selecting and evaluating the alternatives on which a decision will be made, and highlighting the importance of certain values or outcomes, decision makers can exert considerable influence on the decisions that emerge from the discussion. (Morgan, 2006, p. 174)

Another way in which individuals or groups exert power in organizations is through interpersonal alliances and control of what Morgan referred to as the informal organization.
Friends in high places, sponsors, mentors, ethnic or cultural affiliations, coalitions of people prepared to trade support and favors to further their individual ends, and informal networks for touching base, sounding out, or merely shooting the breeze—all provide a source of power to those involved. (Morgan, 2006, p.181)

School districts are no different than any other organization where skilled politicians build and maintain informal alliances in order to advance ideas or initiatives that are important to them. Coalition building can be an art and a science. “The successful coalition builder recognizes that the currency of coalition building is one of mutual dependency and exchange.” (Morgan, 2006, p.181). Sometimes these coalitions are built through project teams like reading curriculum councils and the selection of participants that are perceived as allies of leadership. These coalitions can also occur informally through planned informal meetings. All organizations have informal networks, where people meet socially outside of more formal ways of interacting like meetings and conferences. According to Morgan (2006), leaders who can manage and use informal networks to maximum effect can become powerful players in organizations. They can become influential boundary managers and gatekeepers within organizations.

Regulations, including those that are bureaucratic, as well as job evaluations and “other rules that guide organizational functioning give potential power to both controllers and those controlled” (Morgan, 2006,p. 173). Morgan (2006) noted that rules that govern activities can almost always be used to block activities and that rules are embedded in documents such as teacher contracts. He discussed the work to rule practice where people in the organization use rules that, although originally designed to aid in task performance, or from another perspective can be viewed as an attempt to control or dominate them, are used to turn the tables on those who seek to control them (p. 172). He stated that “rules and regulations are often created, invoked and
used in either a proactive or retrospective fashion as part of a power play” (p. 173). Rules and regulations can be used to constrain choice and exert power.

In *Images of Organizations*, Morgan (2006) also proposed that the control of knowledge and key information is another way in which power is exerted. Assuming the gatekeeper role is one way to use the flow of information in an organization. The ability to control the information released to the organization or to control the timing of when information is released can lead to the ability to shape definitions of organizational realities or exercising direct control. Morgan says, “Even by the simple process of slowing down or accelerating particular information flows, thus making knowledge available in a timely manner or too late for it to be of use to recipients, the gatekeeper can wield considerable power” (p. 175). Thus, mere pacing of the flow if information can be an exertion of power.

In addition to the gatekeeper’s role, there is another way to use knowledge and information to wield power:

Information and knowledge can be used to weave patterns of dependency, by possessing the right information at the right time, by having exclusive access to key data, or by simply demonstrating the ability to marshal and synthesize facts in an effective manner, organizational members can the power they wield within an organization. (p. 176)

Members who aspire to this level of power attempt to establish themselves as experts. The use of knowledge and experience is then used to legitimize whatever goal such a person is trying to achieve. This person will often then carry an “aura of authority and power” that can “lend considerable weight to decisions that rest in the balance or, though having been made in the minds of key actors, needs further support or justification” (Morgan, 2006, p.176). People
may tend to back off in the presence of someone who, through language, has established the perception that they hold expertise in key areas.

School administrators, regardless of what power sources are available to them, are most certainly in a position to exercise power over the organizations. To counter this, counter organizations, or opposing forces, usually rise up to “coordinate their actions to create a rival power bloc” (Morgan, 2006, p.182). The obvious form of a counter organization in the school setting is the local educational agency or a teachers’ union. Unions serve as a “check on management” in organizations that include government agencies like public schools. When examining the relationship of power between administration and teachers during a curriculum implementation, the influence of the Grayhill Educational Association, through formal or informal means, may provide meaningful insights into that relationship. Morgan (2006) states, “The strategy of countervailing power thus provides a way of influencing organizations where one is not part of the established power structure” (p.183). Counter organizations have the ability to influence decisions as well.

Morgan’s (2006) description of some of the sources of power found in organizations offers a more comprehensive look at the power relationships in the school setting than a review of French and Raven’s bases of social power alone. Morgan takes into account the relationships that develop between individuals in the group and offer a glimpse into the motives and strategies that surround the accumulation and use of power. Through the lens that Morgan provided, it is also possible to observe how the ability to influence decisions and outcomes can be used by non-traditional leaders, including key personnel such as teachers who are both part of the formal process but also might assume a leadership role in informal settings. The relationship, possible collusion, or collaboration between parties that is not readily visible also becomes possible when
considering Morgan’s view of power in organizations. Still, it is possible to further explore the subjective or real interests of those who wield power that are at play.

**Lukes’ Three Dimensions of Power**

Thirty years ago, Steven Lukes proposed a new way of looking at power that broadened the definition and the scope under which power can be conceptualized and understood. He proposed a three-dimensional view of power, with his third dimension describing the shortfalls of the first two dimensions. The distinctive features of these three views on power are summarized in table 2. (Lukes, 2005, p. 29).

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<td>d) Subjective and real interests.</td>
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**One-Dimensional View of Power**

Lukes’ one-dimensional view of power, which he also referred to as the pluralist view, is limited in that it only focuses on the study of concrete, observable behavior. The researcher “should study actual behavior, either first hand or by reconstructing behavior from documents, informants, newspapers or other appropriate sources” (Lukes, 2005, p. 17). The study of decision-making is the primary task of research that incorporates the first-dimensional view of power. Furthermore, in order for power to observable, it must exist only in a state of conflict, a conflict of preferences, or a conflict of interests between two or more factions. Lukes (2005) stated the following:

The pluralists assume that interests are to be understood as policy preferences. They are opposed to any suggestion that any preferences might be unarticulated or unobservable, and above all, to the idea that people might actually be mistaken about, or unaware of, their own interests. (p.19)

Lukes (2005) conveyed a main criticism for approaching power from a pluralist or one-dimensional aspect. Specifically, he commented that although it provides a clear and simple paradigm for studying observable behavior and decision-making, the bias of the political system is difficult to account for and that the one-dimensional view is blind to the ways in which agents control the political agenda.

**Two-Dimensional View of Power**

The second dimensional view of power expands on the understanding of the ways A influences B beyond simply participating in decision-making activities. It takes into account the
ways A expends energy to control and shape values and practices that limit the reach of influence and the options available prior to decision-making. This shaping of or influencing of values and practices is ultimately seen as being of benefit to A. The definition of power is expanded from having direct control over decision-making to including concepts such as coercion, manipulation, influence, authority, and force. Furthermore, the use power can be understood to exist in non-decision-making situations where B may fail to act in anticipating A’s reaction. Non-decision-making is defined as “a means by which demands for change in the existing allocation of benefits and privileges in the community can be suffocated before they are voiced; or kept covert; or killed before they gain access to the relevant decision-making arena” (Lukes, 2005, pp. 22-23).

When studying power through the lens of a two-dimensional view, it becomes important to identify not only observable issues surrounding observable conflict but also potential issues. It is also crucial to consider how decisions are prevented from being made about those potential issues.

**Three-Dimensional View of Power**

Lukes’ third dimensional view of power takes into consideration that all conflict may not be observable and that power may be present in the absence of conflict altogether. Power may be used not to shape the values and interests of the organization as well as the very wants and desires of those over whom power is exercised. Lukes (2005) noted the following:

To put the matter sharply, A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he doesn’t want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping, or determining his very wants. Indeed, is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have, that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires? (p. 27)
Lastly, the three-dimensional view includes the possibility that people can be harmed or their interests can be denied in the absence of conflicting issues or grievances. It rejects the assumption that if an observer can find no grievances, then there is a prevailing acceptance of the organization’s values and that there are no interests that are harmed by the exercising of power. The goal for the researcher is to identify, if possible, the contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the real interests of those who are excluded from decision-making power. This potential for latent conflict is not readily observable.

**Lukes’ Concept of Power**

Lukes (2005) argued that power cannot be simply defined as the ability to bring about or receive change because, in part, this excludes the possibility of having the power to resist in a changing environment. Including this subtle distinction, he redefines power “as a capacity: power is a potentiality, not an actuality—indeed a potentiality that may never be actualized” (Lukes, 2005, p. 69). From this perspective, identifying and measuring power by identifying an observable sequence of events or by equating power with the presence of resources, such as money or positional power, is not sufficient. As Lukes (2005) stated, “In short, observing the exercise of power can give evidence of its possession, and counting power resources can be a clue to its distribution, but power is a capacity, and not the exercise or the vehicle of that capacity” (p. 70).

In order to assess an agent’s overall power, Lukes (2005) identified two judgments that must be made. First, a judgment must be made about the significance of outcomes that the exercise of power can generate. All of us have power that can be described as trivial, with a limited impact on the interests of others or the agent as well. Teachers may have the power to resist change on small levels that are not visible and not impactful in a broader context. Different
outcomes have a range of different impacts, and some are more significant than others. Lukes noted that, when assessing overall power, it is necessary to make value judgments regarding what outcomes count for more and what outcomes count for less. Second, a judgment of the scope of an agent’s ability to produce outcomes must be determined when assessing power. When examining the power relationships in a school setting, the conceptual framework should have a wide enough focus to assess power across a wide range of situations. This will allow for a more frequent accounting of power and more opportunities to detect and assess power in the organization.

Lukes’ (2005) view of power focuses on the role of behavior in political decision-making, including the attempts to control agendas surrounding the politics of decision-making in organizations. Groups and individuals within organizations that have an interest in decision-making and are either included or excluded from decision-making processes are both considered when critiquing power. Such an analysis includes the subjective interests held by actors as well as the covert or “real” interests held by those excluded from the political process. According to Lorenzi (2006), “Lukes’ principal argument is that we need to think about power broadly and to pay attention to those aspects of power that are least accessible to observation” (p. 88). Power is seen as the imposition of internal constraints, and those who are subject to those constraints acquire beliefs that result in compliance or consent or their adaptation to being controlled. The imposition of constraints can take either coercive or non-coercive forms.

Lukes (2005) maintained that power is value-dependent. Power is “both by its definition and any given use of it, once defined, are inextricably tied to a given set of (probably unacknowledged) value-assumptions which predetermine the range of its empirical application”
(Lukes, 2005, p. 30). These values define the context through which power is exercised and understood.

The third dimension is present wherever people are subjected to having power exerted on them and where they acquiesce to that power. Using the third dimension of power as a tool for analysis should hopefully lead to an understanding and criticism of the values that lead to people being under the control of others and to understand the values that cause them to acquiesce and even celebrate being controlled or dominated (Dowding, 2006). According to Lukes (2005), A may exercise power over B by “influencing, shaping, or determining his very wants” (p. 27). Power can be at work by influencing desires and beliefs in order to induce compliance without it being intentional.

**A Conceptual Map of Power**

Understanding that power is a capacity and may or may not be observable is important when looking at social influence through Lukes’ third dimensional lens. He offered with guide when assessing power “of things in nature, including persons, to exist and act” (Lukes, 2005, p. 73). First, Lukes mentioned the issue-scope of power, which refers to the number of different issues agents have the ability to control the outcome over. The assumption is that an agent’s power increases when the scope over which an agent has control over widens. Take, for example, an assistant superintendent of curriculum who might have control over curriculum content, teacher assignments, resource allocation, the number of classrooms, and/or the teacher evaluation process. This does not mean that having the ability to control a single-issue outcome is limiting if the importance of the outcome is great; still, broader control over many issues is still very powerful indeed.
Second, Lukes (2005) proposed assessing the *contextual range* of power. Circumstances surrounding the exercise of power have an impact on how we assess an agent’s true ability to produce outcomes. The measure of the extent to which an individual can exert power can be assessed by an assessment of that individual’s ability to influence outcomes in a variety of settings:

Does power identify what an agent can bring about only under conditions that actually obtain or under various alternative conditions? If the first, you are only powerful if you can produce the appropriate outcomes only if present circumstances enable you to do so. If the second, you can do it in a range of circumstances. The first identifies what one is able to do in a specific place and time, given the conditions that obtain there and then; the second the ability that one can deploy across a range of (standard) contexts. (Lukes, 2005, p. 75)

The number of obstacles and the level of resistance in a particular situation limit context-bound ability. Power can be minimized where obstacles exist and resistance is maximized. This illuminates the relationship between power over outcomes and power in the form of resistance. Context-transcending ability, with an agent having sufficient resources and capacities to affect outcomes is many contexts, leads to the ability to overcome obstacles and resistance in particular situations.

Third, unintentional outcomes associated with the exercise of power should also be considered when assessing power. Lukes (2005) illustrated this concept when discussing how powerful people can induce deferential behavior in others without doing so deliberately. A powerful agent, due to merely exercising power intentionally, almost always leaves a trail of unintentional consequences that can be characterized as an exercise of power, and those agents
are accountable for those consequences. For example, an administrator may create an environment where rule-following is a norm strictly adhered to, but if the environment changes, following the rules could result in unintended outcomes. Regardless, when assessing power in research, paying attention to the possibility of unintended outcomes is important.

Finally, Lukes (2005) requested a consideration of the distinction between active and inactive power. Are there instances when not acting is an exercise of power? If an agent has the power to act and chooses not to, and a case can be made that a counterfactual outcome was likely, then by failing to act it can be argued that power is being exercised. It is possible to characterize teachers who do not volunteer time to train or organize new materials or who merely do the “bare minimum” as inactively exercising power to stall an implementation. Also, not intervening in situations that, counterfactually, would prove beneficial to those who are struggling with accepting a new implementation, even in situations not directly associated with curriculum, could also be interpreted as an exercise of power.

In addition, some agents have features that make them so powerful that active engagement is unnecessary. Anticipating possible reactions to actions taken by subordinates is a way an individual in a position of social status can control the actions of subordinates:

If I can achieve the appropriate outcomes without having to act, because of the attitudes of others towards me or because of favourable alignment of social relations and forces facilitating such outcomes, then my power is surely all the greater. It may derive from what has been called the rule of anticipated reactions. (Lukes, 2005, p. 78)

Framing this concept in the educational setting is not too difficult. Prior actions of an administrator or superintendent that demonstrate power, such as teacher assignment decisions or reductions in force or the contentious evaluation of a colleague can result in favorable outcomes
for powerful individuals in other contexts. Even in the context of curriculum implementation, if the administrator has a perceived history of adverse interventions in teacher compliance issues, the fear of overt coercion may be enough to induce outcomes that are favorable without the administrator having to do or say anything. Lukes (2005) noted, “The impact of power is more readily observed in acts of deference, subordination and ingratiation” (p. 78). Power can be observed by understanding why actions may not be taken by subordinates.

**Interests and Power**

How does one measure the importance or significance of outcomes? According to Lukes, assessing power’s reach is directly linked to understanding the interests of agents. The exercise of power ultimately has some effect on the interests of those involved in the power relationship. The strength of that effect is a natural way to assess power. Interests can be thought of as understanding what is important in people’s lives. They can also be understood as deriving from individuals deciding for themselves what is important and as agents deciding for others what is important for them. In the school environment, there are many interests. Teachers can be passionate about curriculum, instruction, and accountability. In trying to understand the relationship of power as teachers and leaders interact during a curriculum adoption of their interests, both shared and individual, it is important to conceptualize the nature of interests. Lukes provides a basic framework.

First, interests can be thought of as preferences. These can be identified by how they articulated through choice behavior or by statements or they can be covert, i.e., hidden from view. These can be preferences that may not be heard due to the political environment or the prevailing culture. Gathering data on both articulated and hidden preferences is a valuable way to understand interests. This is achieved through the observation of “choice behavior or else you
infer, by observation of what they say and do” (Lukes, 2005, p. 81). Preferences are chosen by individuals who hold them and not by others. Although preferences play a key role in interests, what is assumed important to individuals and groups can be decided for them.

Interests can be thought of as the necessary conditions for human welfare. In the school environment, this could be ensuring adequate resources for teaching curricula (whether or not the individual teachers want the resources), providing a structure for teaching (calendars, teaching points, reporting procedures, etc.), and time allocation for professional development or collaborative planning, to mention a few. The assumption is that creating the conditions so that teachers can be effective and secure in their positions would be in their best interests regardless of their personal preferences. Of course, an assessment of power can be proposed based on the effect an agent has on meeting or preventing the fulfillment of one’s interests. As I try to draw inferences on power relationships during a curriculum implementation, assessing teachers’ and leaders’ interests will play an important part. Shaping desires, as suggested as possible in Lukes’ third dimension, is directly linked to being open to the possibility that one’s preferences and interests are being shaped for them as well.
CHAPTER 3: Research Design

This study examined the values and norms associated with power relationships in one school district during the implementation of a new reading curriculum at the elementary level. Three major questions guided this research:

Guiding Research Questions

1. How do teachers describe the roles of others during the process of adoption and enactment?
2. How do teachers make sense of their role in the process of adopting and enacting a new reading curriculum?
3. What are the shared values and norms shaping the underlying structure of social influence during the implementation of a new reading curriculum?

These questions sought information from teachers and administrators about their perceptions and experiences in how power is exercised in the context of a shared experience of a major curriculum implementation.

Research Paradigm/Tradition

According to Schram (2006), “Qualitative inquiry finds its strength in the opportunities made possible by being there and getting close to people and circumstances” (p. 8). The purpose is to understand and interpret social interactions. Moreover, as Domitrovich and Greenburg (2011) noted, “An implication of the value and need for qualitative data is that when consultants or schools consider program adoption, they should not rely solely on published quantitative data of effectiveness. In addition, they are advised to talk with sites already using the program to gain local insights into the practical issues associated with implementation of the program” (p. 209). There are several traditions or paradigms used in qualitative research designs used today. These
include ethnography, phenomenology, case studies, grounded theory, and narrative inquiry (Schram, 2006). Phenomenological research explores the meaning of the lived experiences of a small group of people from the standpoint of a phenomenon:

The underlying assumption is that dialogue and reflection can reveal the essence – the essential, invariant structure or central underlying meaning—of some aspect of shared experience. A phenomenological description is not just an idiosyncratic perspective of an experience or subjective opinion of a meaning. The researcher seeks to convey a meaning that is fundamental to the experience no matter which specific individual has had that experience. (Schram, 2006, p. 98)

Shared experiences can ultimately reveal a common pattern of meanings resulting from shared patterns in the nature of human existence.

Curriculum implementation is a shared experience by many teachers who may work in different grade levels or in different schools in a district. A reading curriculum implementation demands major changes in how they deliver instruction. Reading, as one of the major common cores of curriculum, is highly monitored and, as with math, it is a subject that puts pressure on teachers and schools to prove legitimacy and value to the community. Grayhill teachers participating in the Reader’s Workshop curriculum implementation were experiencing a change in how they teach and assess reading and had to familiarize themselves with new materials. They also face initial and ongoing professional development commitments. For many, this represents the first time they have been through this process. Schram (2006) noted that “you cannot develop an understanding of a phenomena apart from understanding people’s experience of or with that phenomena” (p. 99). It is my goal to develop an understanding of curriculum implementation by learning as much as possible about the experiences of teachers undertaking the implementation.
According to Schram (2006), phenomenological research is rooted in two orienting concepts. The first is Husserl’s idea of epoche, or the ability of the researcher to suspend judgment about the real world or real existence until it is founded on a more certain description of everyday experiences. This requires the suspension, or bracketing, of any preconceptions about the nature of the relationship of power during an implementation. Instead, one is to consider only the experiences or the meaning of the power relationships as experienced by the teachers in the study. In other words, one unpacks the implementation until all that is left is a rich description of what is experienced of the implementation as well as what it means. The second orienting concept is the concept of life-world, or an individual’s everyday conscious experiences in the context of their social setting. It includes “the practical reasoning and commonsense knowledge that people take for granted” (Schram, 2006, p. 99). Phenomenology therefore does not only take pure experience into consideration but also considers the context in which these experiences are shared, locally situated, and founded on actual practices. It includes the state of affairs in which the curriculum implementation is experienced. The meanings that individuals construct as they build experiences are considered reliable and valid.

He (Husserl) argued that people can be certain about how things appear in, or present themselves to, their consciousness. To arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness. Realities are thus treated as pure ‘phenomena’ and the only absolute data from where to begin. (Groenewald, 2004, p. 4)

Subject Selection

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). This highlights the importance of purposeful sampling, especially in phenomenological research.

Initial participants were selected purposefully, allowing the selection of participants who are information-rich and can be studied in-depth. Selection criteria for initial participants included the following:

- Elementary teachers who have a minimum of five years of teaching experience in the district and are highly qualified to teach elementary literacy.
- Elementary teachers who are responsible for teaching 100% of the reading curriculum to their students.
- Participants should be in the first year of implementation, which constitutes the majority of the district staff.
- Elementary teachers who have participated in implementation activities including professional development, staff meeting discussions, and school improvement activities.
- Teachers for which the Reader’s Workshop curriculum represents a major departure from their past practice.

In phenomenological studies, Creswell (1998) has recommended a narrow range of sampling strategies. According to Creswell (1998), “It is essential that all participants experience the phenomenon being studied” (p. 118). Criterion sampling, in which all cases meet some criteria, is useful when considering quality assurance. It is also known as judgment or purposeful sampling. The researcher actively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question” (Marshall, 1996).

Participants who met the criteria outlined above served as the productive participants for this study. Each teacher was experiencing the implementation had taught reading in the district
long enough to fully understand the changes to their teaching behaviors and teaching styles that district leadership was requiring of them. All were highly qualified and held endorsements in elementary literacy instruction. This ensured that each participant had a background that included professional preparation in elementary reading instruction at the college level.

Participants were also selected according to the level of differentiation from past practice in relation to the new reading curriculum. Pence (1998) stated that program differentiation, i.e. the extent to which past and present curricula are different, is a factor in successful implementation. In order to examine implementation as a phenomenon, the new curriculum cannot so closely match a teacher’s past practice that it does not subject the teacher to a significant level of change. Staff that have not taught a reader’s workshop model in the past, including a running record assessment and leveled text by individual readers, will be a priority when selecting participants.

Finally, participants who were in the first year of implementation were selected. Some teachers (a very small number) were teaching the curriculum for the second year. These teachers were part of the reading counsel that found this curriculum and brought it to the attention of the curriculum director. They were also instrumental in designing the implementation processes. For this study, it was important to initially collect information from teachers who represented the majority of staff that were not part of the team that found, lobbied, and eventually helped secure the adoption of the curriculum. I determined that as the study progressed, it might become desirable to examine this phenomenon from that aspect as well.

If we define *power* as changing the behavior of individuals or groups of individuals in a way that they would not behave normally and to change behavior in a way that is desired by
leadership, then participants meeting the criteria above were viewed as having sufficient expertise to provide information-rich sources of data.

**Data Collection**

Gathering data on the ideas or values that ground political activity requires an in-depth analysis of the language of individuals embedded in organizations where these political actions take place. A qualitative methodology based on a phenomenological approach allowed me to obtain a meaningful understanding of the lived experiences of the educators in this study. Meaning is built and shared through the use of language (Schram, 2006). I sought to reveal the meaning of these educators’ experiences through dialogue and reflection.

One qualitative method of inquiry for this study included the use of semi-structured interviews. It allowed for the flexibility to ask new questions during the interviews with the use of a predetermined framework of themes prepared prior to the interviews. This framework was put into practice with the development of an interview guide, which grouped key concepts and questions that could be asked in different ways with different subjects. An interview guide enabled me to focus on specific concepts without being constrained by a rigid format. Moreover, it was beneficial in that it permitted me to tailor questions and prompts to the individual contexts and subjects during the data collection. The interview framework closely matched concepts that were coded during the analysis. Through the use of interviews, I explored each participants’ understanding and experience with the allocation and use of power and her/his commitment to implementation fidelity, and I gauged the perceived legitimacy of the language arts curriculum.

**Positionality**

With over 29 years in elementary education, 17 as a teacher and 12 as a principal, I have been subjected to and participated in numerous curricula adoptions and enactments. In order to
take into account my own position relative to the research setting, it is important at this point to note curriculum adoptions in my past that were impactful in shaping my values around this phenomenon. As a teacher, I was expected to teach a new math curriculum, Math Investigations, which was adopted with little or no input from my colleagues or me. It was largely perceived as a stunt or gesture directed at us by an administrator who wanted to build a reputation as a change agent, especially with the school board. This administrator was often thought of as ambitious and looking to “climb the ladder” of the administrative ranks. The curriculum was not well received and, in my opinion, was inferior to my practice. The fidelity practices of my colleagues and I were less than comprehensive and the initiative did not last long due to a lack of buy-in. My principal commented that each of us could play the role of a pioneer, a settler, or a saboteur. In this instance, although I am not proud to say it, I played more of the role of the saboteur. My feelings during this time are still with me, and on occasion I can recall my feelings of defiance and righteousness as a tenured member of the staff and union leader. Again, with the gift of time and hindsight along with a personal understanding of the challenges that administrators face when they try to be transformational, I am not proud of my performance during this early period in my career, but I have to acknowledge the emotions I experienced and was (am) capable of in similar situations.

Data Analysis

Data analysis using the information obtained from interviews was conducted in the phenomenological research tradition in an attempt to present a rich description of the essence of experiencing a curriculum implementation. Creswell (1998) described the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen steps of data analysis in phenomenological studies as follows:
The researcher begins with a full description of his or her own experience of the phenomena.

The researcher then finds statements (in the interviews) about how individuals are experiencing the topic, lists out these significant statements (horizontalization of the data) and treats each statement as having equal worth, and works to develop a list of non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements generated from a coding strategy.

These statements are grouped by thematic analysis into units. The researcher lists these units, and he or she writes a description of the textures of the experience—what happened—including verbatim examples.

The researcher next reflects on his or her own description and uses imaginative variation or structural description, seeking all possible meanings and divergent perspectives, varying the frames of reference about the phenomenon, and constructing a description of how the phenomenon was experienced.

The researcher then constructs an overall description of the meaning and the essence of the experience. This process is followed first for the researcher’s account of the experience and then for that of each participant. After this, a “composite” description is written. (Creswell, 1998, p. 147)

This study was designed to provide a rich description of the experience of participating in a curriculum adoption. However, I also sought to examine the experience through the lens of power and to investigate how power relationships play out during a curriculum adoption. This required another approach to data analysis that went a step further than traditional phenomenological data analysis, something usually associated with grounded theory research.
traditions. It was my intention to employ both initial and axial coding analysis strategies to identify a single category as the central phenomenon around power and to then explore the interrelationships of other conditions that influence the phenomenon, actions, or strategies used to manage the central phenomenon, as well as the consequences of employing those strategies (Creswell, 1998). To help manage the data collected and to help in the task of axial coding, I sought to employ the NVivo software package as part of my data analysis. NVivo is designed to aid qualitative researchers in managing, shaping, and making sense of unstructured information. The software has built-in tools for sorting and classifying coded data.

**Standards of Quality and Verification**

Validity is always a concern in qualitative studies, but there are several ways I was able to address validity. Triangulation was achieved through the participation of multiple sources, including both leaders and subordinates. Both the decision-making group and the group of subordinates contained enough members to achieve triangulation. The engagement of the researcher during data collection was sufficiently prolonged. Moreover, all the data collected would be subjected to external auditing by both the dissertation committee and cohort members.

Creswell (1998) offered several procedures that aim to ensure the verification of results in a qualitative inquiry. Among those is the concept of 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). Golafshani (2003) noted that in qualitative research, exceptions that result from the triangulation of multiple sources are used to modify theories and in that are fruitful, whereas in quantitative research exceptions can lead to disconfirmation. Collecting and interpreting data from multiple perceptions surrounding a single reality, such as a curriculum implementation, is linked to
describing multiple perceptions of objective reality. For this study, information was collected from multiple participants and from different schools. The goal was to provide a more detailed and balanced picture of the experiences of these educators as they participated in this curriculum implementation as well as to have the opportunity to provide a rich description from more than one standpoint. For the first round of interviews, teachers were selected from three different elementary schools in the district. Grade levels ranged between first and fifth grade. Gathering data from three different sites should increase the trustworthiness of common themes. It was possible for the validity of the data to be threatened due to the accuracy of participant testimony; as such, it was important for me to be open to the possibility that teachers may not be entirely truthful about how they feel about their experiences with the implementation. Truthfulness was recognized as a potential problem since some opinions and feelings about the implementation could be thought of as not acceptable by district administration. Repeat interviews helped to build rapport and increase the validity of the interviews. Teachers also had more time to more deeply reflect on their feelings and beliefs.

Creswell (1998) also stated that writing a thick, rich description allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability and provides them with the opportunity to transfer information to other settings and “to determine whether the findings can be transferred because of shared characteristics” (p. 203). This is the second procedure I used in order to generate a study that is “useful and believable” (Schram, 2003). One of my aims as a researcher is to write in a way that allows readers to deeply enter the research context.

After data were collected and analyzed and emergent themes were identified, a member checking process was used to strengthen the validity. Participants were asked to comment on themes and to confirm or refute the nature of the themes as related to their personal perceptions
and lived experiences during the phenomenon. They were also asked to comment on the relevance of the conclusions drawn from the analysis of those themes and the connection to theory.

A final procedure for helping establish validity is to clarify and reflect on my own research bias and how I applied it and monitored it during my research. As the researcher involved in this study, I acknowledge that I have a potential bias. I am an elementary school principal, and I have a personal interest in my capacity to promote successful curriculum implementation and also to influence the instructional practices of the teachers that I lead. Subjects’ perceptions and feelings could reflect directly on me as a member of administration. Although the topic of this study is of close personal interest to me, the design of the study and the awareness of my personal bias were under constant consideration during all phases of research. From several aspects, the knowledge I bring to this topic is an asset to this study. For 17 years, I was an elementary teacher and subject to curriculum implementations—some successful and others less so. As a teacher, I also on occasion, late in my career, participated in the process of curriculum selection and implementation design. Many of the feelings, beliefs, and attitudes surrounding curricular change are issues that I have personally experienced or have experienced alongside my teaching colleagues. These experiences were useful during all phases of design selection, data gathering, and interpretation activities.

Reflexivity can be thought of as an “acquired sensitivity, a simultaneous awareness of self and other and of the interplay between the two that has become a defining feature of qualitative inquiry” (Schram, 2006, p. 9). Reflexivity means that an individual is as concerned about the process of how research is conducted, including the research topic, conceptual framework, and methodology, as she/he is with the analysis of the data that is collected (Glesne,
2006, p. 125). As Marshall, Fraser, and Baker (2010) commented, “Reflexivity requires critical self-reflection of the ways in which the researcher’s social background, personality, personal assumptions, position and behavior can impact on the research process, particularly the collection and analysis of the data” (p. 21). Self-reflection and an honest and transparent accounting of a researcher’s possible bias is essential in phenomenological research.

Schram referred to several essential aspects that frame the nature of the researcher’s engagement with others and how that engagement filters and influences what counts as meaningful understanding (Glesne, 1999; Patton 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2003):

- The perspectives and subjective lenses that the researcher and research participants bring to a qualitative study are part of the context for the findings.
- The negotiation of research relationships is ongoing, with potential for the perspectives and understandings of both the researcher and participants to change during the course of the inquiry. Part of the researcher’s responsibility is to monitor and account for how these changes influence fieldwork and the interpretation of events.
- Developing self-awareness—that is, examining what a researcher knows and how she/he knows it—is essential to determining the influence of research relationships on a researcher’s inquiry and to constructing an authentic understanding of what is occurring.

Maintaining a research journal during the course of an investigation has many benefits. These include giving audiences the opportunity to see how a researcher goes about constructing knowledge during the study, helping researchers better determine what they know and how they came to know it, and also helping researchers take stock of potential biases as they emerge.
during the process of data collection and analysis (Watt, 2007). Writing memos during the research process can be considered the beginning of analysis.

The first step I took in establishing an accounting of my personal bias was to identify those issues that are the most intriguing to me when I decided on the purpose of my research. Watt (2007) asserted the following:

Researchers first of all need to be aware of their personal reasons for carrying out a study --- their subjective motives … for these will have important consequences for the trustworthiness of a project. If designs decisions and data analysis are based on personal desires without careful assessment of the implications of these methods and conclusions, they risk creating a flawed study. (p. 85)

Is there a connection between my research design, the choices I have made in constructing this research, and any personal bias I hold? My personal reasons for proposing this study, other than the desire to complete the process of earning my degree, include my deep interest in curriculum implementation and learning more about the how to better promote effective change in my organization. There are also possible implications for my future career in education and my belief that the topic of this research could benefit me personally and professionally in the future. However, I think it is important to note that my motivation is not to validate or give evidence to support my personal leadership style or to promote my beliefs regarding how the exercise of power should be used to influence behavior. I am approaching this topic with the goal of searching for a new understanding of how to promote effective change in my organization and its implications for similar organizations. I understand and have to be open to the fact that the data collected may very well reflect poorly on the actions and perceptions of district leadership. I am an active participant in the implementation of this curriculum. These
personal reasons for the decisions I have made regarding the research design and topic were considered during the entire research process and should be evident in my research journal and memos.

   Practical considerations also influenced the decisions I made for this research project. I selected Grayhill-area schools, my organization, as the district from to gather data for the following reasons:

   1. Access to subjects and data collection.
   2. My personal background and understanding of key issues that should allow for a more in-depth and meaningful analysis of the data.
   3. The timing of the Reader’s Workshop implementation and the scope of the implementation.

   The selection of the new reading curriculum in Grayhill as the phenomenon that was chosen for this study presented a rich opportunity for this study form a research rationale as well. This implementation represented the first time in almost 20 years that the district attempted to introduce a district-wide reading initiative with the intended and stated purpose of expecting total fidelity to the curriculum. Reading is a core subject that many teachers have a strong investment in and carry strong opinions about. This bold attempt and shifting power should result in a rich and ultimately important story about the relationship of power and perceptions.

   My maintaining of a research journal during all phases of this study, including the research design, subject selection, interviews, data analysis, and writing the final chapters, all the while writing frequently and openly of my biases, helped ensure that my descriptions of reality were as meaningful and accurate as possible. Glesne (2006) provided questions that are intended to serve as guides when writing in a field notebook:
What in my autobiography led me to this topic?

Why did I select each particular person who is in the study?

Why did I form the particular research questions I use?

Why do I observe where I observe?

What kind of relationships have I developed with research participants and why?

What kind of relationships do I desire, and for what purpose?

What do I think I know, and how did I come to know it?

What values and experiences shape my perspectives and my research decisions?

As I analyze and interpret the data, what do I chose to include, what do I chose to omit, and why?

What became the important analytical themes, and what is it about who I am that makes these themes important?

With what voice do I share my perspectives?

How much do I inscribe myself into the text and how do I present myself when I do?

What do I do with what I have found?

What are the consequences of my choices?

Ultimately, the process of reflexivity and maintaining a journal during my research provide a guide for my readers to understand and respond to my interpretations of the data as well as offer an adequate picture of my personal belief systems and how they relate to my analysis.
During this curriculum adoption, I served as the principal of one of five schools in this district that participated in the enactment of the new reading curriculum. Teachers from around these five schools, including my own, served on the council that is charged with the selection of a curriculum and with designing enactment procedures and all associated decision-making. I was not a member of the council and did not attend regular meetings. However, I did observe two council meetings.

**Ethical Considerations**

As Creswell (1998) explained, “A qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues that surface during data collection in the field and in analysis and dissemination of qualitative reports” (p. 132). Among these are protecting the anonymity of the informants, disclosing the purpose of the research, data security, ensuring all participation is voluntary, and meeting the requirements of Eastern Michigan University’s Office Human Subjects Review Committee.

Research subjects will be assigned aliases, and one document matching participant names and their aliases will be kept on a computer not owned by or linked to the school district. Following the acceptance of the completed study, the document will be deleted. The district and participating elementary schools were given aliases as well. Data were collected, coded, and analyzed on software and hardware independent of the district and were kept secure in a private location away from the district. In particular, the handling, storage, and translation of audio recordings were conducted in a secure location that personnel from Grayhill-area schools could not access. Research subjects were informed of the full purpose of the study and were given an overview of the procedures used in phenomenological research. These volunteers were provided with written documentation that informed them that they may opt out of the research process at any time without having to provide a reason or advanced warning and with the
assurance that their data would not be used. Participants were asked to physically sign a personal consent form that outlined the procedures to protect them from harm.

Written consent that permitted the enactment of this research was obtained from the district. During the human subjects consent process, I described all of the possible risks participants might face before, during, and after the completion of this study as well as all of the procedures that would be put into place to minimize risk. (See the Appendix)
CHAPTER 4: Results

Introduction

This phenomenological study presents the lived experiences of five elementary school teachers during the selection and enactment of a new reading curriculum over the period of three years. Phenomenology posits that people can be certain about things that appear or present themselves to their consciousness and that any information found outside personal experience should be ignored. Personal realities are treated as the only “real” data from where to begin (Groenwald, 2004).

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to present key findings from this study; it begins with a brief description of the participants. The results of the study inform an understanding of teachers’ experiences in three ways by showing that (a) participants believed that they belonged to a group of teachers that held a low status with the administration; (b) a small group of younger, less experienced teachers held an undeserving level of high status during the adoption and enactment; (c) past curriculum adoptions were far more inclusive and resulted in more successful implementations. The three sections in this chapter address the following: (a) the guiding research questions, (b) the findings of the analysis, and (c) the key findings.

This study included five participants. All five were elementary teachers in the same district, and all five were responsible for teaching reading to their students. Each participant participated in some way in Reading Council activities. The Reading Council was a group of volunteers who agreed to meet after school over a period of two years, and they participated in decision-making activities associated with the eventual selection of the Reader’s Workshop and its implementation. All participants were female and their experience ranged from 10-25 years in the district.
Joann was a fourth grade teacher at Grayhill Elementary. She has been teaching fourth grade for all of her career. At the beginning of this study, she was beginning her 18th year in the same district. Joanne taught language arts and social studies to two classrooms while her partner taught math and science. She experienced several curriculum adoptions in the district, including a mathematics and writing adoption in the past eight years. Like Joann, Deb had been teaching fourth grade in the district for several years. She was in her 25th year of teaching elementary students at the start of the study. Deb worked at a smaller district up north for four years before moving into her current district. She did not team directly with any teacher but worked closely with Shannyn. Their classrooms were next to each other, and they collaborated on planning lessons and other school activities. Shannyn has been a fourth grade teacher in the district for 26 years. They consider themselves very experienced in teaching all four cores at the fourth grade level. Cathy was the least experienced of all of the participants. She was in her 10th year at the start of the study, all in fourth grade. Cathy had the most experience in working with the Reading Council at the beginning of the adoption. She attended most of the meetings and was one of the participants selected to go to New York for training. Heather was the most senior in experience of all of the participants. She was in her 28th year of teaching at the start of the study. Her first four years were in Delaware before moving to Grayhill, where she has been teaching fifth grade.

**Guiding Research Questions**

1. How do teachers describe the roles of others during the process of adoption and enactment?

2. How do teachers make sense of their role in the process of adopting and enacting a new reading curriculum?
3. What are the shared values and norms shaping the underlying structure of social influence during the implementation of a new reading curriculum?

**Member Checking Process**

The process of data collection was designed to promote prolonged engagement over a period of time during which participants were engaged in adoption and enactment activities. Data collection began with a face-to-face interview with each participant that lasted for approximately one hour and also involved participant observations of council meetings. Data were also collected in the form of artifacts, gathering written communications in the form of emails, agendas, and meeting minutes over a period of two years. Interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions. After the initial round of interviews, each recorded session was transcribed and broken down into units of meaning. Each recording was also listened to repeatedly in order to get a sense of the organized wholeness of each interview. This guided the process of structuring the second interview with each participant. After the second round of interviews, the data analysis procedures described in Chapter 3 were employed, and emergent themes were identified. At this point in the process, I believed that I had reached the point of saturation, and no new relevant data emerged. I had completed the process of grouping the relevant units of meaning into meaningful themes and identified theories that helped explain the contradictions found in those themes as related to the research questions. I began the process of member checking by sharing my findings with each participant as part of process to promote validity. It became apparent early on that my analysis might not be correct and that an explanation of the data lay outside of what I was proposing. Although during these checks the participants agreed with my analysis, it was readily apparent that I was feeding them the analysis and that they were not connected to my analysis in a meaningful way.
At this point, it was necessary to go back to the data by reexamining the transcripts and the units of meaning as they appeared prior to grouping into relevant units. Also, artifacts that I collected regarding written communication during the adoption were revisited, and a two-year timeline of these artifacts was reconstructed and examined as a prolonged narrative. In addition, data from structured observations were also reexamined. Finally, additional interviews were conducted with participants. The final result of this analysis was the introduction of new theories that shaped my understanding of the themes and contradictions I discovered.

**Findings of the Analysis**

Themes were identified through the interview response analysis and the conceptual framework. Data were coded into units of meaning; thereafter, based on the analysis, units relevant to the research questions were identified along with patterns within the data.

Four major themes emerged as a result of the data analysis. The first and most prominent was the emergence of two distinct groups of teachers serving on the reading council. One group, referenced in the data as the Reading Council Subcommittee, wielded a significant amount of influence over decision-making and council processes. The other group, council members in general, evolved into a lower status group during the adoption. A set of attributes was prescribed to both groups, and a set of sub-themes related to the roles of each group was also identified. Each of these three sub-themes further details the experiences that defined both groups in the eyes of the council members and the interactions that shaped their perceptions. Three other themes shed light on council members’ feelings about and values surrounding the curriculum and the rationale for the adoption.
Discussion and Summary of the Key Findings

Theme 1: Two Groups With Distinct Social Categories Emerged from the Adoption Process

The first two research questions focused on how teachers make sense of their roles and the roles of others during the adoption and enactment of the new curriculum. During the process of identifying units of general meaning during data analysis and determining which units were relevant to the research questions, participants frequently used the terms “they” and “we” when sharing their experiences during the adoption and enactment of the Reader’s Workshop. An important step in trying to understand the perceptions they held of themselves and others was trying to determine who “they” were and who they meant by “we” and then looking for patterns in the units of meaning and seeing what themes emerged. The data suggested that participants identified a small group of teachers distinct in their level of influence, importance, and prestige separate from themselves. Also, it often seemed that participants blurred the lines between this group and the administrators involved in the adoption. Participants identified themselves as belonging to a less clearly defined yet still possibly salient group of teachers that did not obtain the same level of status as the other group. They could be described as belonging to a loose aggregate of teachers that, although more experienced, did not have an influence on decision-making. Shannyn described what she believed the perception of her and others like her was during council meetings: “You know that I’m old and burned out, and I don’t know what I’m doing anymore.” Deb shared one of her experiences witnessing the treatment of her colleagues:

And I think they had an agenda. And I sat in that meeting, and I heard good teachers make comments, say things. And because it wasn’t - didn’t fit nicely into the puzzle in
the direction they needed to go so they could check off the list that, yes, this is the program we’re using. This is what we’re doing. They kind of got slapped down.

Each council member described what she believed to be a small group of teachers who, in conjunction with the administration, were actually in charge of making all of the decisions regarding the adoption of a new reading curriculum. Despite the creation of the Reading Council, with an open invitation for all teachers, this small group was suspected of meeting outside of the council to wield influence over the entire process. Minutes from an early meeting do indicate that a small “executive council” was created to help organize agendas. The first mention of a subcommittee on record can be found in the minutes from the October 18, 2011, Reading Council meeting. The last item mentions the creation of a subcommittee that would “drive the process, set agendas, [and] represent other staff members.” It states that this subcommittee will consist of teacher representatives, a principal, and the curriculum director. Most of the participants in this study suspected that this group of teachers was behind a majority of the decisions and that there was a lack of transparency.

Many of the participants in this study assigned a set of common characteristics to this group. The most common characteristics were their ages and levels of experience. Members of this group were younger and had less experience in teaching than most. This either allowed them to be more easily manipulated by the administration or, because they lacked the amount of status traditionally assigned to experienced teachers, they found a way to improve their standing in the district despite their lack of experience. Cathy summarized how this group of teachers handled decision-making during the Reading Council process: “You know, in the old days we used to
pilot stuff. And it didn’t seem like there were any pilots; it was just kind of, ‘This is the direction we’re going. This is how we’re going to implement it.’"

Deb felt that age or experience had to factor into the opportunity to join this group. She believed that her age or considerable length service might have been a reason as to why she was not included, despite serving on the Reading Council:

Age must be a factor. And not necessarily that age is a bad thing. But age is just a different thing. And maybe it is about where you’re at in your career. And certainly I’m not giving up, okay? I’m not like that at all…. I see, let’s just say that I see that as a variable when you look at people involved… Maybe youth? Maybe younger. Maybe younger [is] synonymous with cutting edge? To look at that, which often older, more experienced teachers, there is that feeling they are set in their ways, old fashioned.

Shennyn agreed that teachers serving on the subcommittee were less experienced than many of the other council members:

I’m not sure I could say less experienced, because I think those people have been around for a little while. But I wouldn’t say they were as old as me. They weren’t brand new out of the box, but I would say younger. What you say in the first third of their careers, I guess.

Joanne noted that this group of select teachers had opportunities that were not available to teachers like her: “When you look at who was sent to New York, there were people sent to New York multiple times. [But] other people never got to go to New York.” Heather described this group as “elite” and noted that they received special consideration when the administration selected teachers to attend training in New York City. Older teachers serving on the council had
very little influence due to this group. She also felt as if age was a factor in determining membership in this subcommittee:

I think you just feel like you are on a committee in name only. You are really not making a difference or your voice doesn’t really matter. Like, okay this is where we are going here, you better get on board. Also being older, it was obvious that it was a younger group of teachers who were chosen.

Most of the study participants held the belief that this small group of teachers referred to in the meeting minutes as the “sub-committee” were in a position to wield considerable influence over all of the decisions made regarding the selection and enactment of the Reader’s Workshop. However, as described in the sections that follow, there appeared to be some disagreement as to whether the administration selected this high-status group to push forward an agenda and as to whether this group of teachers was able to manipulate the administration into doing their bidding.

**1a: The administration handpicked teachers to form the subcommittee and push the Reader’s Workshop curriculum on the council.** Many participants felt that the sub-committee was a deliberate creation of the administration and that the teachers belonging to it were under the direction of the curriculum director. Their youth and lack of experience made them easier to manipulate. Heather felt the agenda was already written and that the subcommittee was a tool to fulfill that agenda.

I think that inner circle was very handpicked of people that were going to support the agenda that the administration had already decided they were going to go with. I think the district already knew the direction they wanted to go in, it really wasn’t an “Open let’s
explore all these different options.” They already knew what they wanted, and I know that I can go to blip, blip, blip and they will support that if I feed that to them.

She described the relationship between their lack of experience and their appeal to the administration for selection on the subcommittee. Teachers like her with more experience would not have been as easy to control. Heather stated, “Teachers who were going to be moldable and hadn’t been around long. You know some of us have been teaching a long time are like okay, we are not as quick to jump on every bandwagon that comes down.”

Shannyn did not draw as direct a relationship between the administration’s desire to push forward an agenda and the selection of teachers to serve on the subcommittee, but she believed that the administration always chose the same group of teachers when making curriculum decisions. More experienced teachers did not share the same access:

I kind of think they have a group of teachers that has consistently been asked to do everything. It’s created a false representation, I feel, of staff. And I kind of think it’s done a little bit on purpose. Not because other people won’t. It’s kind of like Kathy Rayl was trying to do Project Lead the Way and she applied for it. And she was told she couldn’t do it. And so she went back and she said “Why do the same people get to do everything Larry? Why does that happen like that?”

She did not believe that the teachers making most of the key decisions were really representative of the staff as a whole and commented that they were not very forthcoming with information: “And I don’t think they necessarily represent everybody and their opinions. And I don’t even think that all information anymore is really shared with everybody.”

Deb describes these teachers as having less experience and, as such, the administration had more control over them. Experienced teachers would be harder to work with because they
would tell you exactly what they were thinking. As Deb stated, “I think it would be a whole lot harder to look at Heather, [who] would come back to you and tell you exactly what she thought, than it would be to look at [a] younger teacher.” She thinks that they are probably good teachers but are not experienced enough to question the direction of the district:

And I’m talking about people who are good teachers. And they’re known to be good teachers. But I think that when you give that sense of… and I’m not saying they’re not hard working teachers or good teachers. I’m not saying that. But I’m just saying maybe a little easier manipulated, less apt to question the situation with Reader’s Workshop where the prize is status. And because it suits their - it suits them, if you know what I am saying. It’s a lot easier have someone who’s like, “Oh yeah. This is what we’re supposed to be doing. We’re jumping on this bandwagon, “than to have somebody say, “Wait a minute.” And I don’t know whether it would be an experienced teacher or if it would be just anyone say, “I don’t know if that’s exactly right.” Or like I went to a couple of meetings, and I thought, “You rubber stampsmen. This is already that you’re having - that you don’t want my input.”

By choosing the same group of teachers, Deb believed that the administration was responsible for creating a group with enhanced status and, correspondingly, separate social classes of teachers in the district:

They’re more of an elitist group. So I think by doing that and choosing the same people to be on the same committee all the time, assuming that they would be on that committee all the time, them assuming that they have that responsibility or that opportunity all the time, it creates a problem. Often things are done when people don’t even know they’re happening. Other people don’t. They have absolutely no idea… And I think the very
thing that they want to do and preach, collegial sharing, et cetera, it doesn’t happen. And
they’ve created kind of like a two-class system.

Deb echoed Shannyn’s thoughts on the disconnect between the two groups and thought
that the administration was responsible for creating that disconnect:

It’s kind of like they have been ordained or whatever.... out with the old, in with the new.
You know? And I think that there’s not a lot of collegial sharing. And I think that there is
among certain groups, but there isn’t among others. And I really think the administration
has helped to create that separateness.

Shannyn recalled an interaction between a teacher and members of the sub-committee at
a Reading Council meeting:

They have this group of people. And when I sat there, and I saw two teachers that were
good teachers and questioned something or [said], “Well, should we use this? Should we
use, maybe we should use the Teacher College way of leveling text.” And there was a
woman that is a teacher [who] just choked on these women. And it was just kind of like
they were attacked. And both of them were like, “That’s not what I’m saying.” And I just
felt like there was this group of people that received some type of personal self-esteem or
whatever for being - saying what they wanted them to say.

In Joanne’s opinion, less experienced teachers now have opportunities to gain status in
the organization, and a reason for such opportunities is they are willing to go along with what
administration wants in order to gain job security. A teacher with a few years of experience can
supersede seniority. “I think it would be harder to look at, Heather let’s say, and she would come
back and tell you exactly what she thought, than it would be to look at. Now that’s (job security based on experience) changed completely. There’s a law that does that now.”

1b: A group of teachers convinced the administration to form a subcommittee and forced their choice of the Reader’s Workshop on the council. Although participants expressed their belief that the administration, namely the curriculum director, created this high-status group of teachers in order to serve as a vehicle for implementing a curriculum of his choosing, elsewhere in the data they presented another theory that stands as a contradiction. Some of the same participants also suggested that it was this influential group of teachers that manipulated the administration into accepting and supporting the Reader’s Workshop.

From Heather’s perspective, the subcommittee was actually made up of a handful of teachers who were strong proponents of the Reader’s Workshop and were able to convince the curriculum director to adopt the curriculum long before the Reading Council selected it. Rather than being selected by the administration to do their bidding, they manipulated the administration into supporting the Reader’s Workshop:

And I think a couple people were sent to the Teacher’s College; a couple of people were sent to get trained in that. And they came back enthusiastic, and that just kind of pulled the whole group in that direction. Right or wrong, it did.”

She shared who she believed to be the small group of teachers that exercised the most influence on the Reading Council and therefore controlled most of the decision-making during the selection process:

There were a few voices that were heard, I’m assuming. I don’t even know who they were. Primarily primary, who thought that was the way that we should go and convinced the curriculum director, and so, basically, we’re told that’s what we’re doing, because
someone may have piloted and presented it at a meeting. It was never real organized or formal, and it was always “Do it now, do it now, ‘cause we’ve got to spend the money. Do it now. Do it now. We’ve got to spend the money”… I think that it was a directive, that this is what we’re teaching, and make no mistake, it was voiced. The upper elementary did not think that that was a good way to go, but okay. Case in point, we’ve been heard, and this is what we’re doing.

Shannyn also felt that the administration used this select group of influential teachers to push forward with the Reader’s Workshop without any real debate. As she stated, “They pushed and they pushed and they got what they wanted. I try not to look at it that way. A little Pollyanna scooting out of there.” The members of the subcommittee convinced the administration to enforce the enactment of the Reader’s Workshop:

So I would say that the administration, as far as I felt was involved, was, “This is the program we're going to do. Here's how we are going to do it. Here [is] some support for you. Off you go,” so I didn't feel like it was a lot of, we did not… we were not involved in the decision, I did not feel, at that time… But it wasn’t brought to us as staff. It was a select group of people, a small group of people.

The data indicate that many participants believed that the selection of the Reader’s Workshop and decisions surrounding enactment were made by the administration and the subcommittee was a vessel through which they achieved this goal. At other times, they believed it was this group of teachers that was able to manipulate the administration into creating this high-status group and push their preferences toward the Reader’s Workshop:

Several weeks ago, when Larry asked for the meeting about the Fountas and Pinnell assessments, I think that he heard. He heard some questions, and he heard, “We’re not
sure what's going on,” and then when he asked for people to come together to meet to talk about it – and I believe there was one person from each grade level from kindergarten to sixth grade – that I felt empowered. And I responded and said, “I’d really like to help and thank you for offering. I value the chance for me to give feedback.” I think that he did respond to that, and that was positive then, when I was sharing the information – and this happens a lot. We’re getting bigger and bigger. Different decisions had been made at the reading curriculum council meeting and were made at this other meeting, and so now there were a clash of_____ that we were told one thing then we had another meeting, that I wasn't invited to, and it changed.

**1c: Council Members had little influence over decisions and were there to add legitimacy.** Most teachers participating in this study believed that all decisions regarding the implementation were made prior to their involvement. How, then, did they make sense of their roles on the Reading Council? The Reading Council met with relative regularity from the fall of 2011 until the spring of 2013. Many participants felt, during that time, their role was to add legitimacy to the decisions being made. In other words, it was simply their presence the administration and the in-group used to create the appearance of consensus. They believed their presence was meant to obscure the truth—that the decision to adopt the Reader’s Workshop and all subsequent implementation decisions resulted from an autocratic decision-making process and not a group consultative or group agreement model of decision-making. A metaphor for their participation may be that of a masking agent—something undertaken to mask reality that is best hidden to the benefit of the architects of this adoption.

Helen was the study participant who had the greatest amount of time serving on the council and was in fact an early advocate for the Reader’s Workshop. She served from the very
beginning of the process and, although she was an early elementary teacher and the least experienced of the participants, she suspected that an autocratic decision-making model was used and that most of the activities surrounding the Reading Council served an unstated purpose:

> We need to have buy-in, we need to have consistency, we need to have people on board with us. So, we need to have a positive feeling about Reader’s Workshop. So, now that I’m like thinking back on this, although Larry never came out and said, “Everyone, we are doing Lucy Calkins’ Reader’s Workshop. Go.” He never said that. But, now that I’m thinking back on it, like, I wonder sometimes if, in the beginning, that was the direction that they were going. But in order to get buy-in from the committee and then buy-in from the staff, we had these meetings and discussions and used these tools to try to come to a consensus. Does that make sense?

Deb believed that her participation, like those of her colleagues, was designed for the purpose of hiding the truth or lending legitimacy to decisions made by those with real influence over the adoption and implementation. As she explained, “So they got a group of people that rubber stamped it so they could say that they asked.” She believed the decision to adopt the Reader’s Workshop was made before the Reading Council was formed:

> It was the next thing, and it was just going to happen, and I didn’t feel like – I had heard that there were no other programs to equal it, and that this was the way we were going, and didn’t feel like there was a decision… I sat in on some council meetings, and I think there was definitely an agenda there, and we were definitely going that way, and I saw some people that said some different things, and I felt that it was a rushed thing, and I just felt like were having this meeting so that they could say they had this meeting, and they could say this is what people wanted.
Heather shared the same suspicion—i.e., that the decision to adopt the Reader’s Workshop had already been made prior to establishing the council:

I think that going on that committee people thought that they were really going to be able to have a say and [that a] lot was going to be explored. I don’t think that is what happened at all. I think the district already knew they wanted Lucy and that’s what they were going too and they hand-selected people to go to New York.

She could not remember a time during meetings that alternatives were explored. The process through which the Reader’s Workshop was chosen was not clear:

Well, they have the reading curriculum committee, [the] reading committee. And having been on it, I still don’t know – I still don’t know quite how we got there for that. It was, I don’t know, I think it was more said, “This is what we’re doing.” And it was a lot of people to be on a committee. Man, it came from a lot of different directions. But I’m not so sure how much time was really spent on “Is this the best program?” It was just like, “This is what we’ve picked. This is what we’re doing. Get onboard.”

Shannyn was more direct: “The purpose of those meetings was to trick us.” She believed the only way to provide input that would be taken seriously was to provide exactly what the in-group wanted to hear. She said, “I mean, sometimes there’s committees that really do listen to what people have to say, and I’ve sat in on this committees where it’s been like, you know, the way you’re supposed to answer, or the answer that---the right answer. Oh, come on. The right answer?” For the most part, the participants in this study felt that their contributions to the Reading Council were largely ignored, which fueled the notion that their presence only served the purpose of giving an appearance of group consensus:
But I just think that when you don’t value everybody’s opinion or everyone feels that it’s not valued, you diminish your staff. You’re not promoting change. And it very much has the feeling of top-down administration. And it’s kind of like these people are the rubber stamp people to say, “We asked. We asked somebody, and this is what they said.”

She commented that she and her colleagues with the same levels of knowledge and experience felt less valued by the organization as a result of the same teachers always enjoying a different status level in the district:

I think you feel less valued when there is that select group of people that are always getting chosen for committees and are always getting to do things and are considered the go-to people to ask questions or set things up. I think it makes you feel less valued as a member of the community. Your knowledge and your experience [aren’t] respected [much]. I think that some of us have been around for a really long time, and no one is asking us what we think. No one is asking us our opinions. They are saying, “We respect you,” but you can’t respect someone and not go to them and say, ”What’s going on, what do you think about this?”

From the very beginning of the adoption process, Heather tried to inject herself into the inner circle of the Reading Council. Because she was turned down multiple times for a district-sponsored trip to New York City for a week of training at the Teacher’s College. Heather decided to fund her own trip to train alongside the younger teachers driving the process. She felt the ultimate decision to choose the Reader’s Workshop came from administration and that her colleagues did not really have a say in the matter. Her main contributions were limited to less-significant tasks such as working with the calendar and cutting and pasting text from workshop materials into a teacher’s guide:
God. I feel like that came from [the] administration. I don’t know that, you know, - I
don’t think we had that very personal of a role, to be honest. And we batted a lot of things
around, but at the end of the day it was, “This is where we’re going. Get onboard. This is
what we’re doing. And when we walk into your room you better be doing Lucy at a
certain time. I mean I think we put a lot of time in of figuring out the calendar and taking
Teacher’s College and making it work here. We have a way of always reinventing the
wheel. And god, some of those meetings where we just plugged through and we tried to
make them shorter, or lessons and you cut and pasted. A lot of work was put into that to
make the notebooks and to rewrite all the stuff and everything. That’s what we mainly
did on the committee. To make it more teacher-friendly, because the program is not
teacher-friendly. I mean to read 17 pages every day to do a workshop lesson is crazy.

Deb described how she felt sorry for colleagues who voiced opinions that may have not
been supported by the administrator or those who either had their own agenda or were working
closely with the curriculum director to push forward the Reader’s Workshop:

I have seen people sit in the meeting, and because they’ve said something that is slightly
not what the way the direction is going in, just kind of like [makes sound of exasperation]
– not just administrator, but the other people who wanted their way, and I have felt badly
for those people.

Deb believed that if any of her colleagues spoke out against the Reader’s Workshop
during council meetings would have likely been disregarded. That assumption forced her to pick
issues to raise that she felt would be considered seriously. In reality, council members controlled
the dialogue:
I felt – I think somewhat, but I also think that maybe there might be something that came up and people are like, “Oh, I hadn’t thought of that,” because I think if one person said something, and a lot of other people agreed with it then people will say, “Hmm.” I think that if somebody said, “I don’t think we should do a workshop model,” from hell or high water, we would have. I mean, I don’t think that that would have been a situation that would have changed something, but – so, I don’t think no one would listen, ever, but I do get the feeling that, “Okay, this is what we’re going to be doing.” Of course, there’s always rumor before the meetings too. “Oh, I heard this, and I heard this, and so and so wants this, and Steve said this,” and [makes sound of continuation]. So there’s already – you go in there with this assumption, and then you see that it’s leaning towards a certain thing. Like I said, if it’s nothing horrible, you have to choose your battles, like with anything else, how you feel about this one thing. Sometimes you gotta think, “Oh, is this worth – I know where this is going. Is it worth fighting? Is it something that I really think would be damaging to children? Is it worth me doing this? I’ve already said my opinion. Obviously they’re going in a different direction. Does it matter that much?”

She later expressed the response her colleagues received after objecting to the choice of the Reader’s Workshop during Reading Council meetings:

I think that it was a directive, that this is what we’re teaching, and make no mistake, it was voiced. The upper elementary did not think that that was a good way to go, but okay. Case in point, we’ve been heard, and this is what we’re doing.

Deb provided an anecdote to illustrate her point. The Reader’s Workshop requires teachers to administer a running record reading assessment to each student on a regular basis to
match readers with leveled texts. One of the tasks of the Reading Council was to select an assessment to be administered district wide:

People are just like, “No, this…” It was like, that was over the discussion of whether we were gonna go with [the] Fountas and Pinnell leveling system, or the teacher-college leveling system, and it was already decided that it would be Fountas and Pinnell, and somebody raised their hand and said, “Well, have we even looked at the other ones?” And there were a few people from lower elementary that said, “not the other,” and, basically, it was pretty known that it was a done deal and we were going with Fountas and Pinnell.

She noted that many of her colleagues understood the futility of influencing council decisions. Deb shared, “So, but I mean, that gives people the feeling, that I’ve heard from a lot of people, that, ‘Oh, I guess what I think doesn’t matter.’ I’ve heard people say that.” In her opinion, one of the reasons for this occurring is the pressure the curriculum director may be under to meet state or local mandates and that the director and the council may have been feeling pressure to meet deadlines. She added that the process would have been more valuable if more voices were considered:

They have an agenda, and I don’t think… it’s – I think we have an awesome curriculum director, but I think, like anyone else, he is under certain pressures to get certain things done, to comply with the state, to comply with the Board of Education, whatever. I mean, I don’t even know what those requirements are, and sometimes it’s kind of like – same thing, it trickles down to – I’m sure to you, to the classroom, like, “Here. I got to get this objective done, this objective,” and I think sometimes that it just goes to _____. [We] just need more talk time, more people involved in it. We have a council where people go to
talk about reading, but the only thing that happens is they come back and report what’s gonna happen. There’s no one saying, “This is what’s doing. What do you think?” And to me, that would be valuable, to say, “Okay, these are things that are on the board, that we’re talking of looking at for the direction of our district. Why don’t you take that back to your grade level, get an opinion, get [a] feel of what’s going on with this and report back, and then we’ll make a decision.”

Shannyn believed that the workshop was adopted because it was a natural extension of the Writer’s Workshop and that it is likely that no other real options were considered, with the Writer’s Workshop being picked two years earlier under similar circumstances. Again, her role and that of others were a means for the subcommittee to say others were involved in the decision:

I felt like [with the] Reader’s Workshop, there was a decision made because we had chosen the Writer’s Workshop. It was the next thing, and it was just going to happen, and I didn’t feel like – I had heard that there were no other programs to equal it, and that this was the way we were going, and [it] didn’t feel like there was a decision… I sat in on some council meetings, and I think there was definitely an agenda there, and we were definitely going that way, and I saw some people that said some different things, and I felt that it was a rushed thing, and I just felt like were having this meeting so that they could say they had this meeting, and they could say this is what people wanted.

Joann added that a substantial change with this adoption and the processes put in place by the subcommittee was that there was a lack of dialogue in the council. It was important that the subcommittee and the curriculum director had the opportunity to say that everybody was on board with the decision to adopt the curriculum:
It was already, “This is what we are going to do.” And I really think that that’s happening because of pressure put on the administration. So I don’t want to say it’s railroaded through because it’s good stuff. And it’s all cutting edge and things that we’re changing and we’re doing. But what we used to do is we used to talk about it. There used to be ideas and now it’s like “This is what we are doing. There is a right answer, and if you don’t get that right answer, then maybe your opinion isn’t valued. We no longer have that process. And when I reflect upon that, is why don’t we have that process? I really do think because there is an agenda, and we have to say, “Oh yes, everybody.”

**Theme 2: There Was No Real Rationale for Changing the Reading Curriculum**

Participants speculated as to the reason why the district felt the need to change the reading curriculum the year before. Several suspected the rationale for moving the district to the Reader’s Workshop was based on their desire to simply change the curriculum instead of specifically tying shifts in practice to continuous improvement or a long-term strategy. They shared several examples from recent years to support this claim. They felt that administrators were willing to abandon a curriculum, even one that they were proponents of implementing a few years prior, regardless of the consequences. Heather expressed puzzlement over the decision to change reading curricula:

I don’t know if it’s the pressure to [incorporate] the newest and the latest and we’ve got to get on that bandwagon. I don’t understand why we try to fix what’s not broken. But we seem to. And again, if you’ve been around long enough you’re like, “Oh my god, again? We’re going to change it up again? But it was working.” And I’ll take, for instance, the Six Traits Writing. Awesome. And so many of us worked so hard on that, and teachers loved it, and I think our writing was amazing using Six Traits. And then all
of a sudden, three years later, Six Traits is out and Lucy is in. So then you’re like, “Okay, do I revamp everything now that I’ve done again? Because [of] Lucy.” And I was the one who raised my hand at that meeting and said, “In three years from now are you going to be asking me to do something else? Are we going to change again?”

Helen, a member of the Reading Council, also expressed her frustration when discussing frequent changes in curricula, including the shift to the Reader’s Workshop. “So, you know, we’re always changing, and sometimes that’s frustrating, too,” she explained.

Shannyn remarked that the administration often does not realize they are losing practices that are effective and of value when they make changes. She commented that change resulting from being open-minded and thoughtful is good, but one risks forgetting about what is working:

Well, I think – gosh, lots of things. There’s always the next new thing, and as educators, we need to be aware of those new things, but I think that sometimes, the administration jumps both feet into something, and [the] whole hog does the whole thing and throws the baby out with the bathwater at the last program when there are good things in the last program, too. And we need to be eclectic, and as educators, I think a good strong educator in a classroom is going to look at their students and see what they need and pull from many different realms to try to teach those students. But if you can’t every once in a while step out and do something else, then I don’t think you’re a thinking person, and educators need to be thinking people, and we need to see good programs when they come along and use those and implement those parts, but not – but a lot of good programs come along. And I think we forget about them.

Joann shared that this issue is not new and that there is an extended history of implementing new curricula in the district without measuring effectiveness. She stated, “Well,
this is my 20th year in Woody Creek and we have a history of implementing things and not letting them come to fruition and not collecting data to see if they're working and jumping to another bandwagon.” When asked why the district makes changes in this way, she gave this reply: “Different leadership. Different ideas.” Deb was also not sure why the administration changed the curriculum as aggressively as they did: “But we weren’t down in reading and we changed everything.” Deb also believed that the perception that change happens without a sound rationale leads to bad feeling on behalf of the teachers in the district. It also impacts fidelity:

I think usually when a bad decision is made, people are disgruntled about it. They feel like their opinion wasn’t heard. They – I think that they are hesitant to go all in on it. I think that a lot of times when decisions are hastily made, you see a lot of change and a lot of turnover, and I think people don’t buy into it, and they’re like, “Okay, this also will pass,” sort of a thing. They are also not as involved. They don’t feel like they’re part of the process, so that’s more of a directive top-down sort of a situation, so I think that they don’t go at it in earnest.

Deb offered two possible explanations as to why administrators make quick decisions or make decisions without consulting the instructional staff. One may be the pressure that administrators may experience when they believe it is important to appear to be progressive when it comes to curricula. The other may be possible financial issues and the fear that money not spent may be taken away at a later date. The result is an administration that feels pressure to “sell” teachers on a curriculum after it has been adopted:

I think everyone is rushed to make decisions. I think administrators are under pressure to be cutting edge, and they’re under pressure sometimes to, sometimes, what I think is en vogue or what their boss thinks is, or the direct they want the district to take, and I think
that drives a lot. Sometimes I think that’s good, because you have a curriculum director, in my opinion, who should be out there gathering research. They should be looking for cutting edge things, and sometimes that stuff is great. I think often they feel driven and don’t take the time to consult – like I said, all the stakeholders to really weigh out the situation, whether they are being pushed by finances, whether or not they need to spend the money or lose it, or they are feeling like they are under the gun, or we need to keep up with the Joneses, and I think that is hasty. I mean, I don’t want to sit on a good three years to make a decision that something that – decide, but I just don’t want it to be decided in the offices somewhere, and instead of saying “this is something really good,” say, “Let’s see how we can sell it to them.” I mean, that’s the kind of feeling I get sometimes, that it’s – we got them to agree.

Several teachers brought up a change in the writing curriculum several years ago as further evidence to emphasize their point that the administration has changed successful and popular curricula without a clear rationale. According to them, a perfectly good curriculum that was implemented with teacher input was replaced without a justification. One such case happened when the district dropped the Six Plus One Traits writing program for another program after just three years of implementation. Heather described the situation:

And so you just kind of, as a teacher you’re kind of like, “Oh my god, I just spent all this time doing all my lessons in Six Traits, and now that’s out the window and now I’ve got this new program to do. And I was the one who raised my hand at that meeting and tentatively said, “In three years from now are you going to be asking me to do something else? Are we going to change again? …So then you’re like, “Okay, do I revamp everything now that I’ve done again? Because Lucy.” And so many of us worked so hard
on that, and teachers loved it, and I think our writing was amazing using Six Traits. And then all of a sudden, three years later Six Traits is out and Lucy is in. … And again, if you’ve been around long enough you’re like, “Oh my god, again? We’re going to change it up again? I don’t understand why we try to fix what’s not broken. But we seem to.

Several teachers reported that they suspect the administration may not have based their decision to adopt the Reader’s Workshop on an analysis of the effectiveness of current practices, including the use of achievement data. Furthermore, they believed that curriculum decisions in general follow the same pattern and have been part of the district’s culture for years.

**Theme 3: The Reader’s Workshop Was a Good Curriculum**

Despite their anxiety over facing possible sanctions for not teaching the Reader’s Workshop with close fidelity and concerns about how it was chosen, many participants felt that the Reader’s Workshop curriculum was a good choice for the district. Some felt that having a formal curriculum in and of itself was a step in the right direction, while others felt the structure and the comprehensive design of the workshop were an asset to their teaching. Heather was one of the participants who was happy to finally have a curriculum. She stated, “I was glad that we were doing something, we were giving people something. Obviously I don’t want to go back to a basal. But they were definitely trying to tighten things up with the Reader’s Workshop.” When Heather first arrived at Grayhill, she noticed how different reading instruction looked in different classrooms. The Reader’s Workshop brought consistency. She explained her perspective: “[I thought, ‘Wow, this classroom is so different from that classroom,’ because there really wasn’t a set curriculum till we went to the Reading Workshop. So for that I think it was good, ‘cause it got people more on the same page.” She acknowledged that the workshop was a necessary supportive element for new teachers:
Again, I think for young teachers it’s great that you’re giving them something. Before then it was just, you know, young teachers say[ing], “What exactly do you do in reading?” and it was hard to articulate that because the district really didn’t have a reading curriculum. So for that I think it’s great. And I like the broadness of the categories.

Shannyn also held a favorable view of the Reader’s Workshop: “From the beginning I really liked the program and I think I’m one of the few people that really appreciate the program.” Her familiarity with a workshop model was a factor in her acceptance of the curriculum: “I loved it because that was the way I taught. I think there were a lot of people who were like, ‘Oh, this is just another thing that’s coming down the road. They’re going to make us do this. There’s a lot of reading.’” The Reader’s Workshop had improved her teaching:

I’m able to give much better small mini lessons right during the conference, or to compliment the student and what they’re doing, and the writing component is much greater than it has ever been in a reading curriculum that I’ve taught.

The comprehensive nature of the scope and sequence of the Reader’s Workshop and the emphasis on differentiated reading instruction also appealed to Shannyn:

I would have to say it’s being able to identify those students at their level and teach students at their actual reading level where it was hit or miss prior to that in my classroom. Also, I think that having this curriculum, I would hit a lot of those teaching points and those ideas, but some years I would hit them at different – in a different order. Some years, I would use different language, and I wasn’t as consistent because we didn’t have a consistent curriculum at the time, so I was more looking at, “Oh, this would be a good thing to teach right now,” and kind of going with my gut rather than following a
calendar, I guess, or a spectrum, a – what’s the word I’m looking for? You know, a prescribed way.

Deb also mentioned her approval of the curriculum and what it brought to her teaching: “I teach Reader’s Workshop because it works… And when I opened those Lucy books, I was like ‘Oh my god. I’m learning something new?’ And it was exciting. And it was empowering.” Although she previously expressed concerns over how it was chosen and by whom, when describing her opinions about the Reader’s Workshop, she shared that the quality of the program was a factor in the selection by the Reading Council: “So I don’t want to say it was railroaded through because it’s good stuff. And it’s all cutting edge and the things we are changing and we’re doing.” She also stated the following:

I like the Reader’s Workshop. I really did welcome the change. At the time, there was a real need in our district for some structure to our curriculum. Basically, we just had the Basal. I liked the idea of students working in texts that are appropriate for them. Also, it lends itself so much better to differentiation, I feel. So it just feels very natural to use this as a curriculum. So I’ve been pleased with it.

Joanne is another supporter of the Reader’s Workshop:

I have just high esteem for Lucy Calkins and respect for her. I think it's a top-notch program. I think that years ago I have taught reading in so many different ways, and there are things in her program that [make me] think, “Wow, why didn't I ever think about that. Why didn't I just say it this way. Why didn't I point out this.” So I think that she knows her stuff.

She also stated that she sees the advantages of having a formal reading curriculum that provides structure for lesson planning:
We pretty much taught [a] workshop model before. We would do a lesson and then have the kids go and work. We had already done that, but what was different [was that] we just did whatever lesson seemed to be the next appropriate thing for our kids. Some days we wouldn't teach any actual lesson. We would just talk about something during our read aloud that seemed to be a lesson. We didn't have a direction.

Joanne believed her students were more motivated readers after implementation and that data suggest the Reader’s Workshop is working:

My way that I know it's working, my kids love reading. When we don’t get to reading, like MEAPs the last two weeks, they [ask], "When are we gonna do reading? Why aren't we gonna do reading? When I have parents come and tell me at the end of the year, "Oh my gosh, my son or my daughter never liked reading. They never finished a book. They couldn't find the right book." They tell me that they've been amazed at how their love of reading has changed. That, to me, works. You can have all the data and I can look at my NWEA scores and I can see them go up and I can see MEAP scores go up, but it's the excitement and the thrill of when you're reading with them and having them just engaged and just thrilled to be doing it.

She believed that the increased amount of time spent on reading instruction was a factor in student attitudes toward reading books.

They seem to have a stronger love of reading, and I think that's coming from the amount of time we're spending on reading now. We make it really clear to them how impassioned we are about reading and we spend a lot of time on it. I think that translates to them how important it is, and they have this raised level of engagement in it now. I think that's huge. That shows me success in the program.
Cathy also expressed admiration for the Reader’s Workshop. She stated, “... I felt the same way about the reading. I think the curriculum was good. I think it's rich. I think you can do a ton with it. I think it's good and I think it's great that we've focused ourselves on those two huge areas that we really need to.” In other words, although the terminology could be overwhelming, it was worth learning:

She's got her stuff together. No joke. I think the program is great and the thing that makes it kind of difficult is her words are so good. You want to say just what she said because it really is like wow, but it's not naturally how I might speak. So I really do read the lesson multiple times to try to embed her terminology because it's so rich and we're thinking, yeah, if the kids just could get it just like that, they'll really get that and it'll really resonate 'cause there's a lot of stuff, but there's probably 15 great things in every one of her lessons that we're supposed to take a day on.

Cathy also stated:

When we go to grade levels, it seems like to me most people hold it in high esteem. Yeah. So for years we had people saying, "Oh gosh, we need something. We need something." Because everyone was pulling from different places and doing what they thought was good for their kids, but we didn't have [an] across-the-board program that we could spiral, that the vocabulary would also spiral, the skills, we know what they're doing. We had no idea what people were doing before. So I think that at least for elementary that people were happy to have something concrete that we knew this was happening in this grade, this was happening. Well let's see. They've already done this in third grade. So I know that I'm going to tweak it a little bit and build on that. Well, anything new is always overwhelming.
Many participants also commented on how well the implementation went during the first year. They felt that the district did a commendable job supporting the curriculum with material resources and with providing meaningful professional development opportunities. Joann commented on the level of collegial sharing that occurred during professional development:

So everyone seemed to really like that. I think everyone seemed to be and still seems to be talking a lot about what book works for what, which I love that. I love the whole building, having the conversation. To me that shows some real passion, which I've always known is within the _____ schools, but something that really attracts me are grade level has so many passionate people and then now fifth grade as well. Listening to their conversations.

Deb agreed that the training and support put into place helped:

I think I’m doing a better job now than I did then with this training and with this implemented in the supports that have been put in place from the district. So, yeah, I think that I’ve improved as a reading teacher because of this.

Shannyn appreciated the time and support of the administrators during the first year of the implementation:

.... and so we had time to really – if you took it upon yourself too, we had time to read it. We had time to process it, to think about it before the in-servicing happened. And then I think they had quality in-servicing, to actually bring in experts on-site, and to then have a follow up the following year. So I really saw a big investment on the part of the administration.

Shannyn did not feel forced into teaching anything:
I felt valued by not having it pushed on me too. It was like this is what we’re doing. You – these are these things here. We are coming to this, and there were no secrets of this is what’s coming, this is what’s coming, but I didn’t feel forced into it. I felt (the principal) was very approachable about questions that I had. I felt (the curriculum director) was very approachable about it and encouraging.

**Theme 4: Council Members Faced a Higher Risk of Sanction**

Every participant that identified herself as being part of a group that had little say in the direction of the adoption stated that she was worried about facing some form of sanction if she was caught not teaching as expected by the administration. The implementation process was planned to take place over multiple years. For what would be the first year of the implementation, the curriculum director issued a statement outlining the expectations for each teacher. These expectations were attributed to decisions made by the Reading Council.

Although all of the participants were involved in Reading Council activities to some extent, they felt anxiety about being perceived as not following the curriculum to a level of fidelity determined by the Reading Council. This fear of sanction was strongly linked to the Reader’s Workshop curriculum in particular. Joann, probably the participant that was the most accepting of the Reader’s Workshop and an early advocate, still felt worried about how she would be perceived teaching it:

I know I’m doing the best I could possibly do. It’s not like I’m worried about oh no, you’re gonna see me sitting in the back drinking coffee with my feet up. I know that’s not what I do. So there’s no worry I’ll be busted or something. That’s not it. It’s just that you get a glimpse and have no idea what led into that moment. I don’t know. That’s bothersome somehow.
Despite the asserted use of a collaborative teaching model… Cathy offered this comment:

Now the one negative I will say though, I do think the – and this is funny because I had a say in setting the calendar, but that stresses me out. It stresses me out that you are expecting me and not that you shouldn’t so don’t take this wrong the way, but you’re expecting at a given time I should be in a given place.

Cathy continued, discussing the building principal’s observations during the Reader’s Workshop and their limited effect on inspiring implementation fidelity for those committed to the program:

So the observations, then, they add to the stress and anxiety, but they’re not having an impact on how it’s being implemented. I feel like, I don’t know… maybe you would get a different viewpoint if you talked to somebody that maybe – I’m not saying that there [are] people out there like that, but if you talked to [people] that maybe aren’t doing things or they weren’t following the procedures or the units of study or thing like that, if they aren’t you might get a different side. But for us, we’re real followers. We’re told this is the program.

She continued, lamenting the loss of time teaching science and social studies because of the pressure she feels to teach reading without losing pace.

Until Lucy came onboard. So now the only place to beg, borrow, or steal from when you have an assembly, when you’re going on a field trip and everything has to cave, you know, whatever, reading is where we go. Which is the worst place for it to go. But it’s just truthful. So, now it doesn’t go because you have lessons to get done. For sure you have to get those done right?
We feel this shift in people are looking at us and questioning whether we’re doing a good job. The whole conversation in the community, ‘Teachers are overpaid.’ There’s all this negative hanging. I think we feel like we’re not winning this battle, even though, my gosh, we can’t work any harder.

Deb shared the view that the Reader’s Workshop implementation, specifically principals’ observations during reading instruction, was not having an effect on fidelity:

It’s not changing the way teachers who are already doing it to the fullest degree are working. It’s just making us a little worried, which I think it’s too bad. I don’t think it needs to stop. I’m not saying it’s a bad thing, but it sucks that we have to be worried when we’re already doing everything. We’re already working really hard and we’re making sure that we’re planning each lesson and we’re fitting in every little thing that has to come in. When we don’t we’re talking about “Holy cow, I didn’t get to my workshop. Did you get to that? Do we need to do another lesson for that just tomorrow ‘cause it was really good?” We’re constantly aware of stuff so then to have this extra little naggy worry thing is a bummer.

The anxiety felt by many of the participants took a more serious tone, with Deb sharing that many of her colleagues face sanctions due to not being compliant: “I mean, there are people now who feel if they don’t follow certain curriculum, that they’ll be in trouble…. That they would be targeted.” Shannyn also felt that her colleagues feared sanctions: “They feel that it’s mandated. They feel they will get in trouble if they don’t do it.” Heather shared the same concern: “I think they implement the curriculum because they think they’re going to get in trouble if they don’t. So they’re nervous.”
The teachers conveyed that they are anxious about not following the written guidelines. Heather stated, “I guess the part that would just make me a little nervous is so if you walk in and I’m doing reading and it’s not quite scripted Lucy, is that okay or not?” Heather was worried that it may be a problem if the principal caught her making subtle changes to the curriculum during an observation:

So I like the yearly observations. I like that the five-minute little walk-ins. I guess the part that would just make me a little nervous is so if you walk in and I’m doing reading and it’s not quite scripted Lucy, is that okay or not. And that’s the part I think people get nervous about. ‘Cause I’m doing my job and I’m teaching those kids reading, it just may – you know, she’s got those cute little like stories she tells about every lesson and stuff, and it just doesn’t always fit with who I am. So you’ve got to make it your own, otherwise you’re up there doing robot teaching, and I don’t want to do that.

Factors outside of her control that may affect the text reading levels concerned Heather. As part of the implementation, students were assessed three times a year to determine student growth in reading. Students at Grayhill Elementary are also assessed in mathematics and writing over the same period of time. However, it was the reading scores that Heather worried about: “The data, keeping the data also makes me nervous.” She felt pressure to limit the amount of time teaching the Reader’s Workshop by revisiting past practices that would put her in the best position to show growth and not face sanction:

And so sometimes teaching the skill, I think – not all of them, ‘cause I think I like a lot that she does, but there are some times where I think I could do a better job if I just did my own thing. For that skill. But I always get nervous, like is that okay to do that. I’ll be honest, I get nervous about that.
She wondered if the pressure of teaching the curriculum and using the assessments to prove success would eventually make teachers reluctant to work with at-risk students:

I mean you have to make teachers accountable somehow, but again, who’s going to want to take those problem children, those low kids? ‘Cause you know they may not be very good testers, and then does that reflect back on you? You know? That is very, you know, they’re ten. There are just so many variables that could affect that, and it’s frustrating, ‘cause you know how hard you’re working when they do go down. But again, it makes me nervous, am I going to be judged on that, you know, that okay, their dog died, run over last night or whatever, and then they’re going in to take the test. Or dad yelled at them this morning or, you know?

Heather noted that her colleagues are also nervous about teaching the curriculum and fear getting caught not teaching it with the acceptable level of fidelity. According to her, it is this nervousness that motivates them to follow the curriculum, although it affects their level of acceptance:

I don’t think they all buy into it, but they’re doing it. But then how effective is it if you’re not buying into it? That’s the question. And I am tweaking it. Yes, I bought into it, and yes I’m following the calendar, but I am making it my own. I cannot sit with that book on my lap and pretend I’m Lucy and tell those silly stories that go on and on forever, so I switch it up. I change it up. I make it more personal to me.

Joann, a strong proponent of the Reader’s Workshop curriculum, also felt some sense of anxiety over the possibility of being labeled as not enacting the curriculum with fidelity:
There is a risk of us looking like we don’t know what we’re doing, which is an uncomfortable thing when you’re working so hard all of the time. For someone to think that I’m not doing a good job is bothersome to me because I’m working really hard. She too was worried about visits from the principal: “You’re coming in to check up on me, and there’s a negative feeling that goes with that.” Like Heather, she was worried that factors outside of her control could lead to the misunderstanding that she was not doing her job while teaching reading:

I think it is just the fear that you’re performing for another person. You’re gonna get a snapshot of me as a teacher and you have no idea what went on the five minutes before you came in my room. You’ll have no idea what goes on the rest of the day when you are not in my room. So if you’re going to formulate an opinion of me as a teacher and my ability to do this program based on this few minutes that you happen to be in my room on any given day, that be a little eek, tight?

Summary

Five elementary teachers who were implementing a new reading curriculum in an elementary setting were interviewed for this study. The interview data were coded to determine themes. Four main themes emerged with three subthemes. The four main themes were as follows:

1. for the first theme, participants identified themselves as belonging to an aggregate of experienced, knowledgeable teachers that held a low-status position during the adoption and implementation of the Reader’s Workshop. Also, they identified a group of council members that held a high level of status in the organization and also exercised considerable social power. These teachers were younger and less experienced, with
access to the administration not enjoyed by others. Four subthemes were identified as being related to this first theme. First, the administration hand-picked these teachers to do their bidding, pre-determining the selection of the reading curriculum. Second, the inverse of this relationship, the belief that the members of this high-status group manipulated the administration into creating a council and adopting the curriculum they wanted emerged from the data. Third, the council members’ input was ignored and they only were on the council in order to legitimize decisions.

2. The second theme identified in this chapter described council members’ belief that the district lacked a clear rationale for adopting a new reading curriculum. This belief was held in spite of the fact that the district had not formally adopted a reading curriculum in almost fifteen years.

3. The third theme to be described in this chapter highlighted council members acceptance of the Reader’s Workshop as a quality and viable reading program that could and did support the learning of their students.

4. Finally, in regard to the fourth theme, council members and teachers like them faced sanctions from the administration if their fidelity to teach the Reader’s Workshop was weak. This fear was the primary if not the only reason why any of their colleagues taught the curriculum.

These themes and subthemes are interrelated and help to shape the understanding of the lived experiences of teachers undergoing a curriculum adoption. Of particular interest moving forward are the contradictions found in the emergent themes. Participants believed the implementation went very well and that the curriculum selected had strong merit as a curriculum. However, they also felt that it was unnecessarily adopted. Teachers belonging to a high-status
group embedded in the Reading Council controlled decision-making and yet the curriculum handpicked this group to push through this chosen curriculum. How did the roles council members and others played during this adoption and their interactions lead to these contradictions in the data? How can a process heavily dependent on teacher participation and decision-making result in the selection of a curriculum both admired and feared by council members, to the point they doubt the need for a reading curriculum at all? In Chapter 5, I will share a possible explanation for how the role of status, hierarchy, institutional facts, and binding decisions within the organization shaped the belief structures that led to these contradictions in the emergent themes.
CHAPTER 5: Discussion

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to view the creation of social power and the production of a clearly established hierarchy during this phenomenon through the lens of John Searle’s (2003) theories of status functions and the creation of institutional facts. Also, the processes by which the exercise of this social power affected the subjective interests and belief structures of the teachers as made evident by the emergent themes and discrepancies found in Chapter 4. Council members’ roles as power acceptance operators and the curriculum director’s role as a power creation operator will be discussed along with the role of categorization and myth creation during this process. Finally, interpreting the mythology created as a part of this process as a window through which council members interests were shaped will be discussed in relation to Lukes’ (2007) ideas on interests and the exercise of social power. This chapter is organized in the following way:

1. Theme 1: A discussion of how individuals and groups gain status in school organizations.
   a. Binding operational decisions and the creation of social power
   b. The assignment of a status function to the subcommittee
   c. Deontic powers and acts of the subcommittee
   d. Subjects and the relationship between them and deontic power (SRY), hierarchy, and the social categorization of the council
   e. Defensive bias and the creation of attenuating mythology

2. Subthemes 1a, 1b, and 1c: Council member beliefs that attenuate SRY.
   a. Subcommittee members were young and inexperienced.
   b. Legitimacy of SRY: Impossible without council member participation.
c. The subcommittee controlled the administration or the administration controlled the subcommittee.

3. Themes 2, 3, and 4: Beliefs that attenuate values toward the Reader’s Workshop.
   
a. No need for a new curriculum: Reading curriculum adoption was unnecessary and the Reader’s Workshop is a quality curriculum.

   b. The only legitimate reason to teach Reader’s Workshop was to avoid sanction.


   **Theme 1: A Discussion of How Individuals and Groups Gain Status in School Organizations**

   The first major theme to emerge from the data analysis was existence of a clearly established teacher hierarchy within the Reading Council. Council members unquestionably believed that they belonged to a group of teachers that had limited social influence within the council and that another group of council members possessed a significant amount of social influence over processes and decisions. There are two important questions to consider: How did this hierarchy form over the course of the adoption, and what role did language play in their formation? Differences in levels of status are found in every social system. In the social system that was the Reading Council, the lines between the formal authority exercised by the curriculum director and members of his subcommittee were blurred.

   After an initial data analysis, after having identified the emergent themes associated with hierarchy and relevant social or psychological aggregates (the subcommittee, council members, etc.), one plausible hypothesis was that the creation of these groups and the categorization processes that followed were driven by some change in the social context at the macro level. Coinciding with the timing of this study, changes in the teacher evaluation process and the
protections afforded teachers under the Michigan teacher tenure rules took effect. Teachers (including the participants of this study) are now evaluated every year instead of every three years, can be placed on probationary status if found ineffective and are evaluated with state-approved evaluation tools. Also, a percentage of their evaluation is now based on student achievement data. Although references to these changes were not found in the data, I felt strongly that there must be a connection between the contradictions found in the themes and this change in social context. During the member-checking process, when I approached the study participants and shared my thoughts on this connection, to my surprise, every participant did not cite this change as significant in the attitudes and beliefs about this curriculum adoption. During subsequent interviews, the connection between their beliefs and the actions of the subcommittee continued to be strongly associated. The explanation as to why the contradictions noted in Chapter 4 emerged lay outside the possibility that the changes in the state statute were influencing beliefs or constraining decisions by adding pressure or shaping the interests of the participants. The role of hierarchy and status within the council became the area of focus. If social categorization took place and socially relevant groups emerged, it was not due to an outside threat. Some other social context came into play.

Once forced to reexamine the forces that drove the social categorization process, my focus switched to trying to understand the underlying processes that led to the varying levels of status in the council as connected to individuals and the communicative acts that may have shaped status, viewing status as a method of control or constraint within the council and beyond. By revisiting the units of relevant meaning and their relation to language and communication between individuals and groups within the council and by reconstructing the written communications associated with council activities, I began to see how the role of the collective
acceptance of certain social facts, including those that could be classified as deliberately created endowments, could be important to my analysis. This led me to the work of John Searle (2003) and his concept of status functions and the role of language in creating and maintaining social power relationships. It became apparent that language and the relationship between the explicit communications made during the process and perceptions of the implicit messages played a large role in creating and shaping the status/power relationships. Searle and his definition of institutional facts, the constitutive rules that create them, and the acts associated with the exercise of social power helped me capture the emergent nature of these power relationships and the belief structures that emerged as described in the themes.

How individuals make sense of themselves and others in any social system is largely dependent on the interactions with others like them and other groups (Korte, 2007, p. 168). From the themes described in Chapter 4, it is fair to say that council members had rich and meaningful interactions with both the subcommittee and the curriculum director. Meanings, according to Luhman (1995) and others, are largely the products of communication within social systems. Each time an individual enters, exits, acts on behalf of, or complains about an organization, communication has occurred. At the very onset of the adoption process, key decisions (and the communications they generated) set in motion the creation of social categories and defined what role individuals would play in them. This chapter will shed light on the role language played in creating the constitutive rules that led this hierarchy and the processes that sustained it.

The Reading Council process was presented as a group consensus approach (Tarter and Hoy, 2008, p. 150). A group of volunteer teachers representing every grade level, from K-8, would meet periodically to research and weigh different options; they then came to a consensus regarding which curriculum to adopt. The curriculum director was to take the role of the
facilitator and would accept any decision the group agreed with regardless of personal preference. Very early in this process, something changed. Although throughout the process a commitment to a group consensus model was still communicated, at a key point in time the influence of most council members was reduced and a hierarchy within the council was created. How, then, was this shift in influence, or shift in social power, accomplished during the adoption? The answer may be found in understanding the role that decision-making has in the creation of social power. It is important to note that Searle would argue that viewing the following discussion of the aspects of the first theme as a cause and effect relationship would be missing the point. Rather, once a decision was made and was communicated to all in the organization, the emergence of two socially relevant groups with different levels of status, the nature of that status, and the power associated with status, the categorization process and the emergence of a defensive bias all were destined to happen and were rooted in the language of the declaration.
Figure 1. Simultaneous emergence of social facts that constrain the individual. Status functions that enable others and create social power in institutions.

Communication: Binding Operational Decision and the Creation of Social Power

The key finding from this research on the shared experiences of the council members revolves around the concept of hierarchy. It was the dominant narrative that emerged from the data. Creating a hierarchal structure in a social system can be interpreted as a device to reduce the possibility of conflict (Thompson, 2009, p. 60). The subcommittee may have been an attempt to reduce conflict within the grade below it—the Reading Council itself. The data show that overt conflict during Reading Council proceedings was very limited. There was very little resistance to the decisions being made and attributed to the Reading Council in general. Thompson (2009) also noted that hierarchies have come to almost exclusively be defined as groups with higher and lower positions of power, but in fact can be thought of as clusterings that
are more inclusive and designed to handle tasks not capable of being handled by the group at large. In this regard, one may consider the subcommittee as being very successful. The Reading Council was tasked with choosing curriculum that would impact a majority of the teachers in the district, and it accomplished that goal. The existence of a hierarchy alone is not enough to explain how council members made sense of their roles as described in the themes. It does not explain their resentment over their role in the adoption.

In all complex organizations, members belong to contextually relevant hierarchies. There must be clues found in theory that provide information about the connection between these groups, their status, and how the power structure of the council came into being. Two of the guiding research questions of this study seek to find an explanation as to the roles council members and others played during the adoption. From the data, it became clear that council members made sense of their roles through the lens of social status. Recognizing that two distinct groups of teachers possessed two distinct levels of status within the council implies that, at some point during this process, social power had to be created and assigned to one of these groups. How, then, can we explain the genesis of this social power, and how can we describe the applied mechanisms that are found in social theory?

Luhman (1982) supported the idea that one of the purposes for issuing decisions that are binding in social systems is to create social power. If the subcommittee, as identified in the emergent themes, became invested with power, was there a binding decision that created that power? And, if so, what did that decision communicate to others? There is a duality to decisions. They communicate what is spoken and what is unspoken.

A decision communicates also—explicitly and implicitly—that there are alternatives that could be selected instead. (e.g., ‘We are buying machine A and not machine B’). They
communicate not only what has been decided but also that it has been decided. This has significant implications for the dynamics of decisions. (Seidl, 2009, p. 139)

Indeed, very early in the first year of the Reading Council, the curriculum director made the decision to create a distinct group of council members invested with specific powers. An email to the entire council in the second month announced the creation of the subcommittee. A description of the powers of this subcommittee was included in the email to all of the Reading Council. Members of this subcommittee would have the power to plan agendas, debrief council meetings exclusively with the curriculum director, and guide the direction of the entire process. Implicit messages communicated by this decision can be found in the emergent themes. This subcommittee would eventually become the high-status group that shaped the organizational identity of the Reading Council. And, by default, those Reading Council members not chosen eventually came to identify themselves as belonging to a low-status aggregate. Common attributes that council members assigned to both groups would become part of the defensive bias mythology described later in this chapter. The curriculum director’s creating of a subcommittee to work closely with him led directly to the formation of these social categories. By creating a higher status group within the Reading Council, the die had been cast.

This decision communicated that there were alternatives that were not selected. The rejection of the alternative of not having a subcommittee with increased social influence and the rejection of council members as potential subcommittee members without an explanation as to the criteria used were also communicative events. This was the first communication suggesting that group-consensus decision-making may not be the model that the curriculum director planned on employing during the adoption.
These types of decisions are considered binding because the decisions that follow are made in the shadow of those first defining decisions. The decision to create the subcommittee and populate it with certain members of the council placed constraints on future decisions. Lenartowisz (2015) explains the nature of binding decisions:

At its inception, the organization takes its first defining decisions, and in the very act also communicated having done so. These decisions are binding, because subsequent ones are constrained by the options chosen previously. Thus, the realm of organizational choices narrows down, as its operations become increasingly confined by the recursive generation of system components, which remains conditioned by all former decisions. (Lenartowisz, 2015, p. 953)

In this way, decisions themselves constrain the boundaries of all subsequent decisions. The constraint of choice is an act of social power.

Following the creation of the subcommittee, all subsequent decisions, such as curriculum choice, implementation planning, resources, and professional development, were filtered through, and limited by, the subcommittee. This marked a significant moment in the timeline of this adoption. It was a turning point that would shape the direction of the adoption as well as the identities and interests of all K-8 teachers. Once decided, the subcommittee became legitimate as the process moved along. Seidl (2009) describes how initial decisions can gain credibility as time passes and subsequent decisions are made:

This has significant implications for the dynamics of decisions. In the transition from one decision to the next, the uncertainty of the first decision—i.e., the uncertainty about the consequences of given alternatives—disappears. For the second decision it is irrelevant what the initial decision situation looked like. (Seidl, 2009, p. 139)
Certainty for decisions can be established in this way. Once a decision is made, the factors that supported that decision may be solidified in the minds of individuals and the factors that supported the alternative forgotten as time passes.

The explicit communication from the curriculum director’s decision was that a smaller group of people was needed to guide the process and ensure the success of the adoption. Hints at the implicit messages can be found in the emergent themes. Later in this chapter, I will discuss how these implicit communications fed a defensive bias based on the reaction of those not chosen. A defensive bias largely aimed at discrediting the legitimacy of the curriculum director’s decision.

This is not to say that the creation of the subcommittee was a deliberate act with the purpose of creating social power. Technologies are built and operated in organizations when the tasks are too complex to be accomplished by a single individual and the task of producing agendas and designing a process to lead to an adopted reading curriculum may have proved too complex for the curriculum director alone. It is possible, and entirely likely, that the curriculum director was unaware of what was being communicated implicitly. Lukes (2005) explains this that power can be exercised without knowledge of that exertion:

There are a number of ways of being unconscious of what one is doing. One may be unaware of what is held to be the ‘real’ motive or meaning of one’s actions. Or second, they may be unaware of how others interpret one’s actions. Or third, one may be unaware of the consequences of one’s actions. (Lukes, 2005, p. 53)

Perceptions of motive and how consequences are digested by subordinates can be hidden from those in power. One conclusion that can be drawn from the data is that school leaders, when making decisions about the individuals they would work closely with (namely teachers)
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and assigning them rights and obligations, are creating social power. In order for subordinates to accept and observe these rights and obligations, they have to be communicated to the organization. What is the connection between the creation of social power through binding decisions and the creation of hierarchies within the organization? It is clear that the next step is to understand how this power is connected to certain individuals and denied to others. How is this power defined? What roles do individuals play in this relationship between power and people? And, of course, how is this communicated to all stakeholders? The answer to these questions may be found in understanding the role of status functions when creating an organizational identity.

Assignment of a Status Function

The decision to create a subcommittee and assign rights and obligations to a small group of teachers can explain how council members came to identify themselves as belonging to such a disenfranchised group during this phenomenon. At the moment of the status declaration, social power was created, assigned to a group of individuals, and two groups with unequal status came into existence. Through language and communication during the adoption process, this group, from the perspective of the participants, acquired a level of status and influence sufficient enough to have a major effect on the shaping of their belief structures. The ways that certain individuals acquired social power on the Reading Council can lead to a better understanding of the connection between the interactions between members of the council and the study participants and the resultant attitudes and belief structures that emerged from these interactions. Philosopher John Searle (2010) expressed the opinion that all institutional facts “are created by the same logical operation: the creation of a reality by representing it as existing,” One could argue, from the perspective of the council members, that a de facto subcommittee of influential
teachers already existed prior to its announced creation and that when the curriculum director announced its creation, it was in fact a declaration of what in reality already existed. In regard to the act of creating (or declaring the existence of) the subcommittee, a binding decision, and empowering members of that committee with the rights to “set agendas” and “drive the entire process,” Searle would suggest that was the communicative event or status function declaration that imparted a status function on those individuals:

There is, however, a fascinating class of functions where physical structure by itself is not enough, rather people have to assign a certain status to the object in question. And with that status goes a function that can only be performed in virtue of the collective recognition and acceptance of the object or person as having that status. (Searle, p. 14, 2007)

The curriculum director’s decision to create a smaller committee of teachers to “drive the process” and “set agendas” on the Reading Council is what Searle (2010) described as the first step in creating a status function. This declaration followed the implementation of the status function in general terms, putting into practice the subcommittee’s influence over setting agendas and making decisions, became apparent when participants described some of the interactions between themselves and the subcommittee.

A simple representation of the status functions can be described as $X$ counts as $Y$ in $C$. $X$ refers to certain features of an object, entity, person, or state of affairs; $Y$ assigns a status function (to $X$) carrying a deontology in context $C$ (Dolfsma, 2011, p. 811).

This status function formula for the members of the subcommittee may be described as follows: because $X$, a small group of teachers, has status function $Y$, a member of the reading council subcommittee, we accept that $X$ has power (the ability to make decisions). Identifying
the constitutive rule that serves as the basis for this status function, as found in the data, is highly dependent on the perceptions of the participants. Searle (2010) described constitutive rules as standing declarations. In this case, the declaration of the curriculum conveyed that a small group of Reading Council members would meet with him separately to set agendas and “guide the direction of the entire process.” All that is required by members of the organization to sustain the status function is to accept the consequences. This status function could be described as follows: The Curriculum Director makes it the case that these teachers (X) now have the status of subcommittee member (Y) and can perform function (F) in the context (C) of the Reading Council. Council members also needed to recognize and accept, as part of the constitutive rule, that the curriculum director had the authority to create such a group and assign it power. The authority to perform such an act requires recognition. According to Morgan (2006), “It arises when people recognize that a person has a right to rule some area of human life and that it is their duty to obey” (p. 167). Council members believed that the curriculum director assigned a status function to those teachers who would push his agenda of adopting the curriculum without consideration of other options and that they accepted his authority to do so. The understanding that the curriculum director had the power to constrain decision-making and control processes was external to the individual council member and an accepted social reality within the organization.

Searle (2010) suggested that the status function can be spelled out as a set of deontic powers that emerge from the constitutive rules (declarations) that produce them. Stated this way, the status function is written as follows: The Curriculum Director makes it the case by declaration that for any teacher (X) who meets the conditions (P) of having been chosen by the curriculum director, (X) has the status Y to make decisions and set performance standards for
all in the context (C) of the Reading Council. According to council members, the rights and permissions afforded to members of the subcommittee extended beyond setting agendas and include the right to establish rules and performance standards that are expected of every reading teacher in the district. There was a slight or altogether nonexistent boundary perceived between the subcommittee and the curriculum director, as if they were essentially interchangeable. This is illustrated in the data in that council members at different times believed that the curriculum director handpicked his subcommittee to do his bidding and the subcommittee manipulated the curriculum director into choosing them so they could do their bidding. Accepting the consequences does not necessarily indicate approval of the status function. As Searle noted, many times, the point of declaring a status function is for the sole purpose of creating deontic power in the first place and then assigning that power to individuals or groups. If that was the case, the X counts as Y in C formula may be insufficient to describe the status function. If we assert that the curriculum director created the subcommittee for this purpose, we may express a status function formula in these terms: The Curriculum Director makes the declaration that a subcommittee invested with decision-making powers (Y) exists within the Reading Council. In doing so, we create a relation (R) between Y and members selected for the subcommittee S, such as in the virtue of SRY, where S has the power to perform the acts (of type) A. Acts refers to making decisions about the choice and enactment of the Reader’s Workshop and the setting of performance standards for others. As Searle (2010) states that status functions are not just enacted to create deontic powers, but also to assign them to specific people within organizations. It is important to identify exactly how the function itself is spelled out as a set of deontic powers. In the case of this phenomenon, the curriculum director’s open declaration in writing that the subcommittee will have the power to set agendas and drive the entire process
could be described as a set of powers. In other words, the SRY declaration established the existence of the subcommittee, the existence of deontic powers, and the clear relationship that the subcommittee had been assigned the rights to exercise these powers within the Reading Council.

This status function exists only if there is a collective recognition by the council members and teachers as a whole that the subcommittee had the right and privilege to set agendas and “drive the process” (S has power [S does A]). The connection between the formal authority of the curriculum director and those he empowered is accepted. Acceptance, even begrudgingly, of this constitutive rule was necessary to create and maintain the status function. Without compliance, institutional rules are hard to enact (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2007). At no point in the data collection and analysis was it found that any of the participants believed that the curriculum director did not have the authority to create and empower the subcommittee. Searle (2010) summarizes the nature of status functions:

What goes for the line of stones, the king, the corporation and money goes for private property, government leaders, universities, public holidays, cocktail parties, licensed drivers, and nation states, as well as the United States Army, the Mafia, Al-Qaeda and The Squaw Valley Ski Team. In all of these cases there is the creation of a status function by Declaration. God can create light by saying “Let there be light!” Well, we cannot create light, but we have a similar remarkable capacity. We can create boundaries, kings, and corporations by saying something equivalent to “Let this be a boundary!” “Let this be a King!” “Let this be a corporation!” (Searle, p. 15, 2010)

Status function can be found everywhere and are fundamental in their nature. The role of decision-making and status functions provides a lens through which to understand the acquisition
and acceptance of power operators during the adoption. Status functions include not only the creation of power but also the acts operators invested with power perform. With a clearly established hierarchy in place, acts and the messages they communicated would shape the interests of council members. The next section will describe what these powers were during this adoption and what acts that stemmed from the subcommittee’s exercise of these powers.

**Deontic Powers and Acts of the Subcommittee**

The emergence of two socially relevant groups with different levels of status in the Reading Council was clearly established in the first theme in Chapter 4. Any discussion of status, and the different levels experienced by council members is suspect without the identification and description of the power and acts associated with the high-status group, power, acts, and how they presented themselves in the data. One of the assertions made during this discussion of the phenomenon is that acts performed by the subcommittee and curriculum director were powerful communications. Decisions, social interactions (symbolic or otherwise), and non-verbal gestures all communicate messages, both explicitly and implicitly. The assignment of a status function to any entity—in this case, the teachers identified as members of the subcommittee—results in those individuals possessing certain deontic powers that their presence alone without the status function assignment would not enable them to possess. Searle (2007) described the importance of understanding the impact of deontic powers resulting from status functions:

> Now why is all of this important in our lives? Because it creates a vast system of powers. Some writers have mistakenly seen social facts as essentially a source of coercion or and constraint, but what they fail to see is that the constraints exist within systems of enormously increased power. And what exactly is the source of that power? I have described it as deontic powers because it takes the form of rights, duties, obligations,
authorized, permissions, certifications eligibilities, qualifications, etc. (Searle, p. 15, 2007)

They key difference when trying to distinguish between deontic powers as institutional facts and facts in general is relating facts to institutional structures—in this case, the Reading Council. The declaration of SRY and resultant acceptance by council members existed largely within the context of the Reading Council. A crucial test when determining if facts are deontic powers is if the institutional facts involve some form of authorization (authorized to set agendas, etc.) or rights (drive the process). Deontic status for leaders in an organization is an authority that has been created and established by language (Searle, 2010). The status function declaration clearly stated a relationship between members of the subcommittee and specific powers was established (SRY). The curriculum director explicitly stated these powers, including the setting of agendas for all council meetings and debriefing meetings with him. Defining deontic power is also possible by examining the themes that emerged from the data. As Searle (2010) explained, “In general we say that status functions bottom out in human beings, and that the assigned status functions create power relations between human beings” (p. 22). The existence and maintenance of these powers was made possible through language, in the case described as the social interactions between individuals during the Reading Council phenomenon. Acts performed by the subcommittee, as well as interactions that define the nature of the relationship between the subcommittee and other council members, become clear when looking at the data. One act attributed by council members to the subcommittee included selecting the Reader’s Workshop as the new curriculum regardless of the feelings of other council members. Acts by the subcommittee such as choosing the Reader’s Workshop in secret away from the council as a whole and choosing formative assessment tools communicated to council members that their
presence had little real meaning. It conveyed to them that they were being used as a tool to legitimize the acts themselves, which was further evident when their input was ignored during meetings and when fellow members shouted down or outright dismissed them when trying to inject input. As one council member commented, “It was the next thing, and it was just going to happen, and I didn’t feel like – I had heard that there were no other programs to equal it, and that this was the way we were going, and didn’t feel like there was a decision… I sat in on some council meetings, and I think there was definitely an agenda there, and we were definitely going that way.”

Interactions during council meetings reinforced the SRY and the certainty of the acts performed by the subcommittee. The legitimacy of these acts was rooted in communication. Within the social context of the Reading Council, these deontic powers and the resulting acts were law. One council member shared the following:

They have this group of people. And when I sat there and I saw two teachers that were good teachers and questioned something or say, “Well, should we use this? Should we use, maybe we should use the Teacher College way of leveling text.” And there was a woman that is a teacher just choked on these women. And it was just kind of like they were attacked. And both of them were like, “That’s not what I’m saying.” And I just felt like there was this group of people that received some type of personal self-esteem or whatever for being - saying what they wanted them to say.

Another council member provided insight into the interactions between these two groups when exercising their power to make decisions during meetings:

I mean, sometimes [there are] committees that really do listen to what people have to say, and I’ve sat in on these committees where it’s been like, you know the way you’re
supposed to answer, or the answer that – the right answer. Oh, come on. The right answer?

Another member of the council shared her observations from council meetings, describing ways in which the status function was reinforced:

I have seen people sit in the meeting, and because they’ve said something that is slightly not what the way the direction is going in, just kind of like [makes sound of exasperation] – not just the administrator, but the other people who wanted their way, and I have felt badly for those people.

The interactions at the status function acceptance operator level described above illustrate how this hierarchy and the status function (S does A) were maintained through language during council meetings.

This section began with the goal of trying to understand how the lived experiences of these council members as they went through a two-year process of serving on the Reading Council could result in such a strong identity of belonging to a low-status group that now feared the consequences of teaching a curriculum they had a hand in selecting and adopting. Up until this point in their story, it is clear as to what process probably played a role in the creation of the hierarchy in the Reading Council. From the moment the status function was created, council members’ roles changed. They became status function recognition or acceptance operators. Functions assigned to the subcommittee and the acts that followed could only exist as institutional facts if the participants in the institution had interactions that were complex enough to represent it and recognized or accepted the relationship between the status function and those identified with it based on the declaration. According to Searle (2010), “Acceptance need not
take the form of an explicit speech act and can range all the way from enthusiastic endorsement to grudging acquiescence” (p.103-104). Recognition or acceptance operators only need to acknowledge that the institutional fact is real.

**SRY, Hierarchy, and Social Categorization Within the Reading Council**

Another aspect of the first theme, as two distinct groups of teachers emerged with different levels of status, was the simultaneous creation of two social categories, or psychological aggregates, that council members shaped through communication. So far, I have explained how status groups emerged as a result of a status function created by the curriculum director. The status function created the relationship between the subcommittee and the power it held. Through this relationship, communication or symbolic interactions during council proceedings fleshed out the identities of both groups in the eyes of council members. Searle (2010) emphasizes the identity people possess by their relationship to power as the primary focus when understanding status functions in organizations.

Where power is concerned, and the whole point of institutional facts is the creation and distribution of power, it is not the Y term as such but the people who stand in the appropriate relations to the Y term who are the bearers and objects of the powers in question. Sometimes, but by no means always, the relation is one of identity. (Searle 2010, p. 22)

Judging by how they felt about their role, council members struggled with their low-status and experienced interactions during council meetings that reinforced their position within the group. During structured observations of council meetings it was clear that decision-making power was being reserved for the subcommittee and meetings were little more than opportunities for the curriculum director to share those decisions and provide a rationale to council members.
Both meetings began with the curriculum director outlining decisions made by the subcommittee during the interim between meetings and carefully explained the rationale for each decision. These included decisions about assessment practices, resource allocation, and direction of the council in general. Members of the council were relegated to the role of listeners. This became clear when council members shared stories about what would happen if someone raised a question or spoke up during meetings, reinforcing their view that they were primarily there to add legitimacy to the process. Searle (2010) would describe their roles as primarily being the of power acceptance operators. Power acceptance operators are often subjected to obligations, or negative power, such as being compelled to stay quiet and teach the Reader’s Workshop out of fear of sanction. Council members were also obligated to not speak out during meetings and to accept their role as legitimacy agents. The group of teachers on the subcommittee was essentially an extension of the power creation operator, i.e. the curriculum director. In essence, if SRY directly assigned powers of the curriculum director to them, they and the curriculum were one and the same. They wield the same positive power—setting agendas, making key decisions, and driving the process. Therefore, a firmly established hierarchy was amended with the addition of several council members moving from a position of low status to a position of high status.

The decision to select certain individuals and assign them a contextually relevant category (SRY) also led to the creation of another relevant category—a group “psychologically intertwined” with the fate of others in their organization (Ashford, 1989, p.21). Council members shared the same low status, were subjected to the same obligations, were similarly dismissed during meetings, and faced the same threats. As Korte (2007) noted, “The concept of social self emerged and was elaborated to explain observed differences in behavior between individuals as a person (personal identity) and the individual as a member of a group (social
identity)” (p.168). Although individuals may not have identified themselves as belonging to a formal or politically active group, they understood that the more experienced, and perhaps older colleagues on the council faced the same negative power that they did. As Deb shared:

I think you feel less valued when there is that select group of people that are always getting chosen for committees and are always getting to do things and are considered the go to people to ask questions or set things up. I think it makes you feel less valued as a member of the community. Your knowledge and your experience isn’t much respected. I think that some of us have been around for a really long time and no one is asking us what we think. No one is asking us our opinions. They are saying we respect you, but you can’t respect someone and not go to them and say, “What’s going on, what do you think about this?”

Low-status groups can be cued by a perceived threat and/or shared goals when they identify with the same psychological aggregate (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 24). Psychological groups that identify themselves as belonging to a low-status group will construct meanings that will bolster self-esteem and/or attenuate the social position ascribed to the high-status group. According to Korte (2007), “Generally, the relevant group for a particular social identity depends on the salience of that group in any situation. Therefore, one may variously perceive his or her membership as part of a workgroup, organization, profession, industry, nation, society, race, or human being” (p. 168). These meanings are described in the literature as defensive attribution bias or as creating attenuating myths designed to improve self-esteem by creating a narrative that renders the relationship between the subcommittee and the powers attached to them as a result of the status function assigned to them. Ashford & Mael (1989) discuss how low status individuals and groups respond to their situations:
Negatively regarded groups utilize such defense mechanisms such as recasting a negative distinction as a positive one (black is beautiful), minimizing or bolstering a negative distinction (We’re not popular because we don’t play politics), or changing the outgroup with which the ingroup is compared. (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 24)

Recasting distinctions or bolstering negative attributes are mechanisms by which individuals and groups create an attenuating narrative around themselves. This leads to a release of anxiety or low self-esteem that accompany being the member of an outgroup.

Social categorization results from two related processes. First, there are the acts of communication that define boundaries for groups of individuals in the organization. Verbal and nonverbal interactions during meetings and individuals joining, leaving, or being excluded from certain groups and tasks are all forms of communication. Emergent themes shed light on many of these interactions, as perceived by council members. Council members wondered why more experienced teachers, others described as having the same background as themselves, were not selected to serve on the subcommittee. They also noted that the same teachers connected to the curriculum director were always chosen for high-status positions. They described incidents when fellow council members were dismissed when offering opinions, options, or questions as well as incidents when they themselves were dismissed. Council members reported that the the curriculum director, subcommittee, or both had already made key decisions and were brought to meetings with the intention of garnering acceptance, thus directly appealing to the council members’ roles as acceptance operators. All of the acts that the council members described defined category membership for both groups of teachers, regular council members, and the subcommittee.
The second process of social categorization is self-enhancement—i.e., creating a subjective belief structure that presents an individual in a positive light. The individual relegated to an out-group strives to make sense of the situation while still maintaining a level of self-esteem that is comforting. Individuals responding to a common threat or situation that relegates them to a low-status caste can and do form loose social aggregates with others like them in a social system. People identify with groups because of the pride they feel and the connection and meaning associated with membership (Hogg & Grieve, 1999). In some cases, social identity functions as a driver of competition among groups. From this perspective, group behavior is concerned with the struggle between groups for power, status, superiority, and material advantage (Korte, 2007, p. 170). How then does a member of a low-status group cope with this need to enhance one’s self image in his/her eyes or others? According to Morris (2008), “By contrast, highly identified members of low-status groups (e.g., women) may be especially motivated to repudiate social inequalities as a means of improving their position” (p. 205). Part of the process of self-enhancement includes the creation of an attenuating mythology, which confronts or dispels the hierarchy-enhancing mythology that is threaded within the belief structure or structures that surround those in high-status groups, such as those to which a status function has been attached. Within the common threads found in the themes identified in the data, it is possible to discern a mythology created by the council members. Certain questions were left unresolved at the end of Chapter 4: (a) How can council members both believe in the quality of the Reader’s Workshop and yet deem it unnecessary even though the district has not had a reading curriculum for almost 20 years? (b) Why is there some disagreement in the data as to the origins of the creation of the subcommittee, with council members believing both that the curriculum director hand-picked a team to push forward his agenda and that this team
manipulated him into pushing their choice of curriculum? (c) Why are past adoptions, ones that failed to take hold long-term, looked back on as favorable and successful? (d) Why do council members feel as if they were only present to add legitimacy to a process that they participated in for over two years?

Understanding the mechanisms by which hierarchies were formed and the roles teachers and others played in the status function can be summarized as follows: The Administrator (I) makes the declaration that a subcommittee invested with decision-making powers (Y) exists within the Reading Council and, in doing so, creates a relationship (R) between Y and members selected for the subcommittee (S), such as in the virtue of SRY, where S has the power to perform acts (of type) A, as accepted by council members (H). We now know how both high- and low-status groups came into being. Looking back at the emergent themes, we can now see possible explanations for many of the contradictions found in the data. Low-status groups, even as loose psychological aggregates that accept their status, have mechanisms they employ to construct belief structures to counteract threats to self-esteem and well-being. These belief structures often take the form of attenuating myths or defensive bias.

**Defensive Bias and the Creation of Attenuating Myths**

Along with the creation of socially relevant categories as a result of the creation of the status function, one final aspect of the first theme, rooted in that decision was the inevitable creation of defensive bias and myths that helped deal with deficits in self-esteem felt by those outside the relationship between the subcommittee and the powers attached to those teachers. Again, it is important to remember the distinction between accepting the power relationship and the approving of the power relationship. Council members constructed their own meaning about themselves and those around them during this adoption. They identified as belonging to a low-
status group from the language they shared and, as such, constructed a belief structure with many commonalities. This belief structure was defensive in nature and was used to try and make sense of what they underwent in light of their experiences and low status. Two possible methods to attenuate the legitimacy of the status function were found in the data: narratives that sought to reduce the legitimacy of the relationship created between subcommittee members and the deontic powers assigned to them and narratives that related to the acts performed by the subcommittee. Both of these can be interpreted as attempts to rescue the self-esteem of council members excluded from the status function. Ashford and Mael (1989) noted that the stronger the threat perceived by the lower status group, the stronger the reaction through defensive bias (p. 25). Understanding their reaction can help explain contradictions in the data, the first of which relates to the origins of the status function. The data suggested that council members at different times felt that either the curriculum director handpicked those individuals that would serve his purposes or at the very least selected the curriculum he wanted or that an opportunistic group of teachers seized the opportunity to control the process and select the curriculum of their choice by manipulating a new leader eager for change.

Acts ascribed to the subcommittee included choosing the Reader’s Workshop curriculum with no consideration of alternatives as well as selecting student assessment tools and assessment practices. The second contradiction noted in the themes concerned one of these acts. The data suggested that many council members at some level approved of and noted the value of the Reader’s Workshop as an effective curriculum and as one that was needed. At other times, when sharing thoughts about the subcommittee, they believed that the Reader’s Workshop was unnecessary and that the only rational reason they could see for its selection, even in light of not having a reading curriculum to replace it, was that leaders always seek to change what was not
broken and that it was selected simply for the desire to make a change. In addition, the Reader’s Workshop curriculum would face certain resistance without the presence of council members to give it legitimacy during council meetings. Dolfsma (2011) offers an alternative view including how status functions are perceived by those outside of the power structure:

Language as the fundamental institution furnishes symbolic representation that is essential for institutional recognition and reproduction, and therefore for re-identification of institutions through change. However, the actor understanding an institution, behaving in accordance to it and reproducing it (incompletely), is not a part of Searle’s definition. There is inevitably a measure of discretion, misapprehension, or error involved for each individual in interpreting what an institution requires her to do: individual $H$ to some extent evaluates or judges $X, Y$ as well as $C$. (Dolfsma et al., 2011, p. 811)

Individuals both judge the nature of the relationship between those who have power, the nature of the power assigned and the context in which the status function exists. Those outside of the status function create a narrative that surrounds the status function. The need to remove threats and self-enhance self-perceptions when belonging to a low-status aggregate is powerful. I propose that myths surrounding this adoption fall into two distinct categories. Both sets are attempts to attenuate the established hierarchies. The first category deals with myths that seek to establish that SRY was not legitimate. The second category deals with myths that destabilize the legitimacy of acts performed by the subcommittee.

**Subthemes 1a, 1b, and 1c: Council Member Beliefs That Attenuate SRY**

These three subthemes, the categorization of subcommittee members as young, inexperienced teachers, the assertion that council members were needed to legitimize the acts of the subcommittee, and the belief that the curriculum director handpicked the subcommittee to manipulate the process, all deal with the subjective belief structure that seeks to attenuate the relationship created between the subcommittee and the powers assigned to them. They directly challenge the legitimacy of the teachers on the subcommittee, the administration, and the power
they wielded. The need to create a belief structure that does this in and of itself supports the existence of these two groups. Furthermore, these myths may be understood as council members’ unarticulated interests. In other words, it was in the interest of the council members to create a narrative that devalued the subcommittee members as a social category and the relationship they had to the powers assigned to them. These myths, as unarticulated interests, can shed light on the nature, or dimension, of social power in the organization.

The Subcommittee Members Were Young, Inexperienced Teachers

As the council members asserted, members of the subcommittee were younger and less experienced teachers, with the assumption being that they were unworthy of the powers assigned to them. The inverse—that many council members that were not part of the subcommittee or were rejected for membership were more experienced and knowledgeable—is important to consider. Council members needed to somehow create a defensive narrative as part of their subjective belief structure that would help offer an explanation as to why they were not on the subcommittee and why their input was ignored during council meetings. Both situations were a threat to an individual’s self-esteem. Younger, less-experienced teachers would not be able to make good decisions compared to more experienced teachers that have been down that road before (e.g., Everyday Math, John Collins Writing, Lucy Calkins Writing). What message does this mythology convey? The entire process was flawed due to not seeking out and entitling the more experienced, older teachers on the council. There was a missed opportunity to get it right. It is important to note that this may not be an indictment of the status function in general, or an indictment of deontic powers and resultant acts assigned in a status function. Rather, it is an indictment of the individuals selected for the status function. As power acceptance operators, their acceptance extended to status functions—just not the roles assigned to actors.
Legitimacy of SRY: Impossible Without Council Member Presence

As important as it was to build attenuating belief structures around the selection of teachers for the subcommittee, council members constructed a narrative, in light of their roles as acceptance operators. This narrative enhanced their self-esteem and made sense of their perception of not having the ability to influence decisions. Council members reported that members of the subcommittee summarily dismissed experienced teachers who sought to inject their input during council proceedings. These communications reinforced the nature of the status function and further reinforced levels of status for both groups. Council members defined their primary role during the process of being used as agents of legitimization, which furthers the point that they were needed for their experience and expertise. Rather, they were included due to their ability to attach their standing within the community, which supports the myth that this was a rigged process from the beginning and was an acknowledgement of their positive standing outside of the council and within the educational community at large. Their acceptance was important and necessary to push forward the agenda of the subcommittee. This hints that they were aware that they played the role of status acceptance operators. The success of the status function, including the granting of deontic powers and the acts resulting from those powers, relied on their acceptance and was enacted through their participation in the Reading Council.

It is important to point out that mythologies constructed in this manner are not to be understood as untrue or embellished. On the contrary, attenuating mythologies can be considered as absolute truths, in that they are created in due part to the lived experiences of those who create them. A common misunderstanding is that mythologies are just misunderstandings that only need to be debunked with the dissemination of more information or a clearly articulated opposite point of view. Leaders struggle with debunking myths. The point of this discussion is to connect
the creation of mythology with its origins in this social system, i.e., the creation and assignment of a status function early in the adoption process. Once that initial binding organizational choice was made, myth creation was not only likely but also inevitable. As such, what do the patterns in the themes have to say about the attenuating mythology that was created?

The previous subtheme dealt with the mythology that sought to attenuate the legitimacy of the subcommittee members. This subtheme offers the complimentary inverse: that the council members that were older and more experienced would have been better suited to be part of the SRY formula. The unsuitability of the subcommittee members necessitated the participation and aura of acceptability only worthy of the council members left out of power and influence. Again, status functions are acceptable, especially when they assign a function to an individual and similar persons in her/his social aggregate.

The Subcommitte CONTROLLED By or That CONTROLLED the Curriculum Director

The belief that the subcommittee somehow managed to convince the curriculum director to enact the Reader’s Workshop prior to the formation of the Reading Council and the belief that the curriculum director handpicked teachers who would go along with his choice to enact the Reader’s Workshop prior to the formation of the Reading Council were both found in the emergent themes. One way to explain the coexistence of both beliefs is to understand the purpose of those beliefs to establish the relationship between the subcommittee and the powers assigned them was illegitimate. There had to be an alternative explanation as to why they were picked.

One narrative that made sense and provided this explanation was the belief that these younger, opportunistic teachers seized an opportunity to gain status in the organization by acquiring the attention of the new curriculum director and convincing him that the Reader’s Workshop was the best way improve reading scores and show the school community that the
new leader was cutting edge and innovative. This is important in that it clearly establishes a coercive explanation as to why certain teachers were selected to receive this status function and why others, including council members participating in this study, were not. It is an alternate origin story to the one that is found after examining written communications from the curriculum director during the early months of the Reading Council. From that perspective, after an initial meeting of the whole council, it was determined that a smaller group meeting separately would help move the process along. These communications seem to support the notion that any interested teachers could nominate themselves to join this subcommittee. Having this group already exist in council members’ narrative/mythology negates the possibility of not having been asked to join. In other words, there was no possibility of being rejected. To apply a sports metaphor: An individual cannot lose a game she/he is not scheduled to play, or, better yet, a person cannot be a loser if there is no game. Since past adoptions that they played a larger role in were successes, it naturally follows that this adoption was at risk.

One of the questions about discrepancies found in the data pertained to how council members could both believe that the curriculum director selected teachers to serve on the subcommittee based on their support for the Reader’s Workshop curriculum and hold the perception that it was this same small group of teachers that manipulated the curriculum director into empowering them so that they could push forward the curriculum they wanted, i.e., the Reader’s Workshop. Both themes reflect council members’ perception of SRY. The status declaration itself makes believing the former understandable, but what about the latter? In the next section, I will describe how the belief that a small group of teachers convinced the curriculum director to do their bidding and that the council members were assigned a predetermined role of acceptance operators that would lend legitimacy during the process from
part of the attenuating mythology that groups with low-status create. For now, according to the themes, SRY was created either as an act of selecting one group of teachers over another by the curriculum director or as an act of coercion on the part of the high-status group and unrelated to the choosing of one group of teachers over another by the administration due to fair criterion that would judge one group as superior to another. S only exists because it declared itself into existence and also created Y. There is evidence in the written communication that the curriculum director did in fact create a subcommittee and actively solicited participants from the council in general. How, then, is it that, through communication during the Reading Council process, council members perceive this as being true? It may be important for council members to believe this creation myth in order to make sense of what transpired and to process the meaning of belonging to a low-status group. These two myths, that the creation of the status function was somehow an illegitimate collusion between parties with an unspoken agenda, are not indictments of status functions, deontic powers, or acts. Those are acceptable. However, when on the outside looking in, establishing the suspect nature of the motivation behind the status function was important.

Themes 2, 3, and 4: Myths That Seek to Attenuate the Acts of the Subcommittee

Themes described in Chapter 4 support the proposition that council members created a myth that delegitimized the acts performed as a result of the SRY. These include myths that seek to raise doubt as to the appropriateness of the Reader’s Workshop, the questioning of the very need for a new curriculum, the fact that they were ignored during council meetings and therefore had no control over acts, and the assertion that the only reason their colleagues taught the Reader’s Workshop was to avoid sanction. These themes, although directly related to the two status-level groups, do not directly address the aspects of the status function that include the
binding operational decision maker (the curriculum director) or the members of the subcommittee directly. They focus on the results of the major acts performed as a result of the status function, the selection of the Reader’s Workshop, and the processes of enactment. These themes deal with the Reader’s Workshop itself and the primary motivation for teaching it to children. It was not to deliver a curriculum to support student learning.

**No Need for a New Reading Curriculum Despite Its Quality and No Previous Curriculum**

Another attenuating myth that emerged from the data was that the entire process, the very need to adopt a new curriculum, was unnecessary and therefore not legitimate. By extension, the decision to create the subcommittee and the status function assigned to it were not legitimate. It is important to note that council members recalled successful adoptions in the past and the need for curricula and the district had not enacted a reading curriculum for almost 20 years. Council members were also complimentary of the Reader’s Workshop curriculum. This contradiction can be explained by understanding the need to create a self-enhancing mythology. Regardless of the quality of the curriculum or the need for a curriculum to fill a long-standing void, it was important for these teachers to some extent describe the curriculum and the process as illegitimate. This has powerful implications for leaders moving forward.

**Teachers and Council Members Faced Sanctions If Not Faithful**

One major theme to emerge from the data was the belief that teachers, including council members, were afraid of getting into “trouble” if they were caught not teaching the Reader’s workshop. The primary motivation for teaching with fidelity was out of fear of sanctions. Most council members held a favorable opinion of the Reader’s Workshop curriculum and were happy with that curriculum’s alignment with the Writer’s Workshop, a curriculum adopted years before. Following a group agreement model for decision-making in which the quality of the
curriculum and subordinate commitment were important, leaders not having sufficient expertise in reading theory, the belief that autocratic decisions would be rejected, members had shared goals at the outset, and that experienced teachers with knowledge of language arts were included, how could a major outcome be that a fear of sanctions would be an identified rationale for teaching the new curriculum? How does the myth that teachers will be in trouble if they are not enacting with fidelity attenuate the hierarchy behind the decision?

In the data, it was difficult to find indications of any objective input that would translate into a threat of job security on behalf of council members. Council members were consistent in their belief that their fellow teachers were motivated only by fear. Absent of any evidence of an overt threat, it is left to try and understand how this myth or subjective social reality supports the attenuation of the hierarchy and the enhancement of the group’s self-esteem. One possible explanation could be that, in the event the Reader’s Workshop was successfully enacted, with adequate instructional quality and program adherence, an alternate narrative was necessary to explain that success other than the sound judgment and successful exercise of deontics power by the subcommittee—power that was denied to other members of the council. Their fellow teachers could accept the consequences status function and their diminished status, but approval of the status function and the acts that resulted would be difficult. The successful outcome of any rational decision-making model, including group agreement models, is eventually an acceptance of the decisions made. Council members may have been needed to legitimate those acts. However, in the end, those acts, devoid of their influence, would never be accepted. To extend the sports metaphor used previously, even if they won, there would be no fans to celebrate and no belief that they won fairly. The curriculum director would have had a true victory if he chose to play the right players. By emphasizing the coercive nature of the enactment, council members
were calling attention to the illegitimacy of the council process. They were establishing the fraudulent nature of the communicated shared decision-making model. As French and Raven (1957) argued, “The strength of coercive power depends on the magnitude of the negative valences of the threatened punishment multiplied by the perceived probability that P can avoid punishment by conformity” (p. 157). In other words, compliance is a mechanism by which an individual can avoid sanction. The greater the threat, the stronger the coercive power to ensure compliance.

Illocutionary Acts That Maintained Status Function

The relationship between the subcommittee and the powers assigned to them existed primarily within the context of the Reading Council and, perhaps to a lesser extent, in the K-8 community as well. According to Searle (2007), in order for institutional facts to exist, collective recognition or acceptance of the SRY function by the participants in the social organization is dependent on the language that builds and maintains the status function. Members of the reading council, as well as teachers in the organization, needed to understand the deontology carried by the status function in order to accept the legitimacy of the acts. It is important to note that this status function was also dependent on the context—in this case, the continued existence of the reading council, including its communicative practices, monthly meetings, interactions, and written communications. According to Searle (2007), the use of vocabulary associated with status functions fuels the continued existence of the status function.

The legitimacy of these acts—in this case, the selection of the Reader’s Workshop, the rules and expectations governing enactment, and the suppression of council members—is fragile and will only exist as long as the Reading Council and the language embedded in these practices exist. The status function is also dependent on the constitutive rule that the curriculum director
possessed the formal authority to create the SRY within the council. What happens when the 
Reading Council ends and the language that shaped the power relationships in the council ends?
SRY only existed or was recognized within that social context, and the collectively recognized 
constitutive rule behind the binding operation decision was directly linked to one leader. A 
change in leadership and a change in social context leave behind the acts performed, including 
the key decisions regarding curriculum selection and enactment as well as the residual 
mythology, the defensive bias, and social identities created by the status function. In this way, it 
can be said that change, innovations, and curricula enactments are as fragile as the status 
functions that created them and the leaders attached to them. It is important to ask the following 
questions: What is the real currency when adopting a curriculum this way? Is it the enactment or 
is it the process of enactment that serves as the ultimate currency?
Figure 2. The cyclical nature of curriculum decision-making and myth dominance. This figure illustrates how status functions assigned during shared decision-making or autocratic decision-making are two processes with similar results.
CHAPTER 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

Five elementary teachers implementing a new reading curriculum in an elementary setting were interviewed for this study. The interview data were coded to determine themes. Three main themes emerged, each with several subthemes. The three main themes were as follows:

1. Council members identified as belonging to an aggregate of experienced, knowledgeable teachers who held a low-status position during the adoption and implementation of the Reader’s Workshop. Subthemes related to this included being used by the administration to provide the aura of legitimacy to the process and the decisions that came from the council, being ignored by their Reading Council colleagues, and feeling anxiety over enactment.

2. A small group of young, less-experienced teachers had the power to make decisions outside of the Reading Council process. Subthemes related to this included that this group had influence and control over the curriculum director, the curriculum director handpicked this group to manipulate decisions, this high status group had access to resources and preferential treatment, and this group made the decision to adopt the Reader’s Workshop long before the Reading Council process began.

3. A separate but related theme deals with attitudes towards the curriculum itself and stands in contrast to meanings constructed around groups and status. The Reader’s Workshop has merit as a reading curriculum, and the enactment went well, the structure of a formal curriculum was needed, young teachers will benefit from the support embedded in the
program; students are more motivated to read; there was no clear rationale for adopting a new curriculum; it was not necessary to make the change.

These themes and subthemes are interrelated and help to shape our understanding of the lived experiences of teachers undergoing a curriculum adoption. Of particular interest moving forward are the contradictions found in the emergent themes. Participants believed the implementation went very well and the curriculum selected had strong merit as a curriculum, but they also felt that this was an unnecessary adoption. Although the district did not have a formal reading curriculum for years, they felt that this change was made for the sake of changing and that new leadership always leads to these changes. Another contradiction concerned the origins of the subcommittee. Participants shared a belief that certain teachers managed to manipulate the curriculum director into creating the Reading Council process to forward their agenda and controlled decision-making. They also believed that the curriculum director handpicked this same group to push through his chosen curriculum.

Possible explanations for these contradictions may be found by carefully examining the role status plays in social systems such as the Reading Council, a system created for the purpose of making key decisions that would have a significant impact on teachers’ lives. The relationship between social power and those that wielded it within the council tells a story about status, social identity, and the constructed meanings that shaped reality. This relationship can be summarized by the following status function declaration: The Administrator (I) makes the declaration that a subcommittee invested with decision-making powers (Y) exists within the Reading Council and, in doing so, creates a relationship (R) between Y and members selected for the subcommittee (S), such as in the virtue of SRY, where S has the power to perform acts (of type) A, as accepted by council members (H).
Introduction

The purpose of Chapter 6 is to explain the conclusion and recommendations of the study. There are seven sections in this chapter: (a) the importance and purpose of the study, (b) guiding research questions, (c) conclusions, (d) implications for school leaders (e) contributions to theory, and (f) suggestions for future research.

Importance and Purpose of the Study

Curriculum adoption and enactment are an important features of schools. They are costly in terms of time, effort, and financial investments. Adoptions and enactments involve complex processes and symbolic interactions that define roles for school personnel and shape the social structure within the organization. A deeper understanding of the meanings that emerge from these symbolic interactions and the associated defining of roles can shed light on how schools function as organizations and guide educational leaders attempting to promote positive change within their organizations.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to provide a detailed account of teacher perceptions of their experiences adopting and enacting a major curriculum adoption over a period of three years. This study described the complex relationships and symbolic interactions that occur during an adoption from the perception of experienced teachers. As an instructional leader, it is this researcher’s responsibility to understand the roles teachers and administrators play during consultative, collaborative decision-making processes and inform the educational community of relationship between the underlying social structure of these processes and successful implementations.
Guiding Research Questions

1. How do teachers describe the roles of others during the process of adoption and enactment?

2. How do teachers make sense of their role in the process of adopting and enacting a new reading curriculum?

3. What are the shared values and norms shaping the underlying structure of social influence during the implementation of a new reading curriculum?

School systems and individual schools in particular can be characterized as social systems. Social systems are held together by meanings that are constructed through communication between elements in the system (Luhman, 1995). The first two research questions sought to answer how individuals construct meaning, and, as an extension, how they construct an identity for themselves and others in the organization. The third research question sought to illuminate the meanings that shape the organizational identity of the school district and particularly the structures that control curriculum selection and implementation.

Conclusions

This is a story about power. As defined in Chapter 2, power in social institutions is having the ability to change an individual’s behavior. As Morgan (2006) noted, “Sources of power are rich and varied, providing those who wish to wheel and deal in the pursuit of their interests with many ways of doing so” (p. 166). In the case of the reading curriculum adoption examined in this study, power can be thought of as having the ability to make decisions and dictate how teachers approach teaching reading in their classrooms. However, it is not as simple as the exercise of formal authority over others by someone who has a legitimate claim to having that power. School leaders often seek to shape the interests and values of teachers through shared
decision-making models, thereby encouraging acceptance and enthusiasm for change and decreasing resistance. Interests might be hidden from view “because [they are] unrevealed in actual choice situations: they make take the form of half-articulated preferences or aspirations which, because of the bias of the dominant political agenda or the prevailing culture, are not heard and may not even be voiced” (Lukes, 2005, p. 81). This phenomenological study sought to uncover the voices of those who held or were subjected to social power and influence during the adoption. How, then, do so many adoptions fail in the long-term? How do the roles that individuals play affect long-term success? For this study, it is important to not only identify who wielded power and how that shaped the values of those subjected to it but also to describe how power was created and acquired under the shared decision-making model used through the mechanism of the Reading Council.

There are four main conclusions drawn from the discussion in this chapter:

1. Innovations rarely take hold; only the process of attempting innovation is constant.
2. When the language of innovation dies, the innovation dies.
3. Innovations at the district level start and end with leadership.
4. Myths are hard if not impossible to debunk and are deeply rooted in identity.

**Summary of Findings**

This phenomenological study was conducted to learn about the lived experiences of teachers undergoing a major, multi-year curriculum adoption and enactment. I would liken this phenomenon as a struggle between two opposing forces, though not necessarily between two groups with different status. In actuality, status functions, categorization, and hierarchy were the mechanisms behind the struggle. Curriculum innovations, such as the Reader’s Workshop, have an energy behind them. They have inertia that drives them forward; the source of that inertia in
this case was the curriculum director and the subcommittee who, in the view of the council members, invested substantial effort in selecting and enacting the Reader’s Workshop. This type of inertia typically faces an opposing force—in this case, it was the defensive bias and mythology that emerged at the same time. It is possible that one may not exist without the other. Attempts at shared decision-making are attempts to minimize the opposing forces. But, taken over time, in the context of school innovation, the balance changes. When the process that propels it, and the individuals and roles they play such as those that make binding decisions and those who act as status function operators no longer are relevant, the inertia that propelled the innovation ebbs. I believe this is at the heart of the repeated cycle of failure to innovate in schools. Status functions and the hierarchies created as a result provide a meaningful description of how these forces shape the nature of innovation in schools.

**Innovations Never Take Hold; Only the Process of Trying to be Innovative Is Constant**

It is important to consider the long string of enacted and failed educational innovations at the macro and micro level over the years. Efforts such as No Child Left Behind, Reading First, and The Education Achievement Authority all failed to produce results or have long shelf lives. Moreover, at the district level in reading, there has been a long stream of innovations that have promised success, such as Project Read, Reading Recovery, Orton Gillingham, and a host of published basal series that include differentiated texts and comprehensive scopes and sequences. Formative and summative assessment innovations such as running records, AimsWEB, Dibels, NWEA, MEAP, and M-Step come and go. The cycle of underperformance followed by the hope of a new innovation followed by underperformance and so on is a true constant.

Obviously, there has to be an economy behind this cycle that is not based on student achievement; instead, another reward system is driving it. This curriculum adoption provides a
glimpse at how innovations are not really about student achievement. They are about the process of staging an innovation and the rewards that are created. Rewards such as status and social power and the status that individuals enjoy by assuming the role of change agents are powerful motivators. It is important to keep moving forward, from one initiative to the next, in order to maintain this status, either in the same district or as one moves along, climbing in rank. During this adoption, I learned how status and social power can be created and assigned to individuals. These individuals share personal goals that align with those of leadership. A small group of teachers, by virtue of playing a role that promotes leadership’s desire to be perceived as a change agent, acquired status and social power. They carefully and at times forcefully defended their status during council activities.

Curriculum adoptions are one facet of this issue. Innovations include assessment, school safety, funding, personnel, and tenure law. As mentioned before, leaders promoting changes they claim will solve issues with school performance can be present at all levels—federal, state, intermediate school districts, locals, and at the school level. Regardless of the unit of analysis, leaders can be found promoting their innovations that will lead to success. There are those who hitch their wagon to these innovations in order to benefit from the rewards that follow from participating in the process of implementing these innovations, and ultimately the failure of the innovation to take root and deliver on the promises made.

Consider how the process of adopting and enacting the Reader’s Workshop empowered individuals and rewarded them with status and security. Council members believed that the relationship between the subcommittee and the curriculum director was an alliance that benefited both. Newly arrived school administrators changing curricula was one of the reasons they believed the Reader’s Workshop had such inertia that the adoption was inevitable. In addition,
the teachers that eventually were identified as the subcommittee members aligned themselves with the curriculum director and attached themselves to the security and status such an alliance provides. Finally, the council members felt they were puppets that were needed to establish legitimacy for the teaching staff as a whole. All of this results in the process of adoption—the process as a means to acquire and exercise this social power.

**When the Language of Innovation Dies, the Innovation Dies**

The role of status functions in the hierarchies created during shared leadership in schools can help explain how curriculum initiatives have such short shelf lives. Status and social power are directly tied to the process of adopting a curriculum. This may include decisions regarding enactment, as the enactment itself. If functions are observer-relative, the task-right system—in this case the SRY—is subject to the recurrent behaviors that carry out the status function. Once the language and vocabulary of the status function comes to an end, prompted by the removal of the social context the surrounds the status function (SRY in the context of the Reading Council), individuals in the social system are left with the acts they have accepted and, more importantly, the defensive bias and resultant mythology. Without the language that sustained the relationship between the subcommittee and the powers as well as maintaining the role of council members as acceptance operators, these roles lose meaning. However, the identity of the council members as an in-group of experienced, legitimizing agents stays intact. The seeds of failure have been planted and left to take root. The next opportunity to acquire a similar status and social power, and the rewards they provide, will not exist until the next opportunity to repeat the process.

**Innovations at the District Level Start and End with Leadership**

The story of this adoption began with a new curriculum director’s desire to select and enact a reading curriculum for all students, kindergarten through eighth grade. The roots of the
power structures that drove and constrained the process of adoption are found in decisions made early on by curriculum. Whether or not either party initiated the coalition between the subcommittee and him, the purposes, goals, and values that defined this social system were created by leadership. Formal communication was largely conducted by him, at council meetings and through frequent, lengthy emails to staff. It was his recognized formal authority that created the structure of social power and the task-right system that was the Reading Council. His influence is woven through all of the themes. What happens when the leader is no longer part of the organization or moves to another role? Status functions and the social power structures they create can be brief (Tuomela, 1997, p. 497). Changes in leadership or an absence of leadership, which in this case would mean a new curriculum director, would surely have an effect on communication and the institutional facts embedded in the language of the institution. There would be new coalitions, new purposes, and new goals, as well as another change in innovation.

Consider the mythology that council members created during this adoption and enactment. They felt the Reader’s Workshop was a valuable curriculum and desperately needed. They were relieved that the district was finally making an effort to repair the mistake of neglecting reading for so long. They were glad that a shared-leadership model was being used in the form of the Reading Council. Yet, they constructed a defensive mythology that specifically targeted the roles and relationships of the status function and the resulting acts. This defensive mythology could be labeled as a legacy mythology. It was deeply entrenched by the end of the second year and still intact during the third year of the adoption. This mythology was rooted in the language of the status function and shaped the very identity of council members. This social reality was constructed over a long period of time and could not be simply debunked by asserting the falseness of each myth. Implicit communications may prove too powerful to be debunked by
explicit communications. Consider the curriculum director’s declaration that a small subcommittee would help set agendas and drive the promise. The implicit message sent over a long period of time was that a small group of young, inexperienced teachers gained favor and status by convincing the curriculum director to do their bidding. It is fair to say that council members mined a deeper construct of the subcommittee through these interactions that would not be easily dismissed with statements to the contrary. Their social identity and the myths that supported their self-esteem and attenuated the threats against them would still be impactful well into the future.

If we assume a causative relationship between the assignment of the status function, to the establishment of a hierarchy, the process of categorization, and, finally, myth creation, it seems that it would be possible to reshape these belief structures by recasting the subcommittee or attempting to reshape the narrative by reassuring the teachers that their perceptions were not rooted in reality. However, as Searle (2007) has stated, trying to establish a causative relationship with status functions is missing the point. The constitutive rule that allows the creation of social power in the form of this status function, the formal authority of the curriculum director, exists simultaneously with the status function, the hierarchy produced, and the subject belief structures of the acceptance operators. The illocutionary exchanges that created and maintained the status function may eventually ebb, but the mythology may continue to be salient as long as the leader and the formal authority attributed to him remain in play, and continue to be present thereafter. When a new leader comes into an organization, the potential to create more social power with a new hierarchy may emerge, and the process repeats itself. The organizational bias toward these relationships continues, and only then a new mythology will emerge. In this
way, debunking myths that threaten an enactment is difficult if not impossible to achieve in time to save an innovation.

**Implications for School Leaders**

Administrators, especially curriculum directors responsible for creating the processes by which decisions are made, need to take into consideration an understanding of the effects of status and hierarchy on the interests of subordinates. Consider the status function as described in this study: The Administrator (I) makes the declaration that a subcommittee invested with decision-making powers (Y) exists within the Reading Council and, in doing so, creates a relationship (R) between Y and members selected for the subcommittee (S), such as in the virtue of SRY, and S has the power to perform acts (of type) A, as accepted by council members (H).

On some level, this describes an attempt at shared decision-making in the district. Shared decision-making is the goal of many curriculum leaders, and committees, councils, cabinets are more than likely present in many districts. It is the acceptance operators—those who will be responsible for enacting the curriculum with fidelity—that will make or break one’s chances of success. Here are three considerations a curriculum leader may consider based on the conclusions from this research.

1. Consider how closely your process is attached to your personal role within the organization. The connection between you personally, the individuals you enlist to join in decision-making, and the acts they (you) perform shapes the bias of those who will be required to enact the new curriculum. The likelihood that the innovation will survive after your role has changed within or outside the organization may be linked to the strength of this association.
2. Communication surrounding the adoption and enactment of an innovation is more complex and impactful than you may understand. Every explicit communication, declaration, or agenda/minutes/meeting summary also communicate implicit messages, driven by the roles and preferences of each individual. The context enveloping every message shapes the nature of implicit messages. Consider that context as objectively as possible before sending messages. Also consider processes that ensure communication that supports and continues to emphasize the importance of your innovation that is not too dependent on any single individual.

3. Individuals entering and/or exiting a social system are also powerful forms of communication. Thinking deeply about the process by which you select (and as a consequence exclude) individuals to serve important roles in your shared decision-making model is as important as consideration of the individuals themselves. In situations when you will be sharing power, those excluded will build some form of construct or subjective belief structure around those individuals chosen, and that belief structure will shape attitudes toward the innovation, either positively or negatively, but it will be powerful. Construct your group carefully, with an eye toward equal access and diversity.

**Contributions to Theory**

I have three contributions to theory based on my research. The first two concern Lukes’ theories on power and the questions he asked concerning the detection of third dimensional power and assessing the scope of power. Third dimensional power is not explicit and includes shaping the very interests of those who are subjected to power. According to Lukes, interests can
be thought of as preferences or as conditions that are necessary for survival. From Lukes’ perspective, the interests of individuals are key in proving that power has indeed been exercised on an individual and can determine the significance or importance of outcomes. Interests are often unarticulated and can be discovered through observation or by inferring what people say and do. This research would suggest that defensive bias and defensive mythology are expressions of interests and, as such, illustrate the context-transcending nature of power as described by Lukes. The intentional outcome of the administration in this study would be the enactment of a new reading curriculum. One unintentional, or at least unarticulated desired outcome, was associating fidelity to trouble-free employment:

There are a number of ways of being unconscious of what one is doing. One may be unaware of one may be unaware of what is held to be the “real” motive or meaning of one’s actions. Or second, they may be unaware of how others interpret one’s actions. Or third, one may be unaware of the consequences of one’s actions. (Lukes, 2005, p. 53)

The administration enjoyed this level of compliance and the acknowledgement of the power that they possess without ever having to explicitly articulate their intention of holding teachers compliant through intimidation or coercion. That would have been extremely unseemly and unpopular with stakeholders. Conceptualizing defensive bias and attenuating mythology as an expression of unarticulated interests and supportive of the context-transcending nature of the exercise of social powers reinforce Lukes’ (2005) conceptualization of power as contextual-transcending and his assertion that interests can be used as a measure of the significance of exercised power.

The second contribution to theory concerns Lukes’ (2005) response to critics who challenge the notion that beliefs, resignation, interests, or states of mind that constrain
individuals can be desired outcomes of the exercise of power rather than simply by-products. Three-dimensional power requires the manipulation of these interests or beliefs as the outcome and ultimate proof of the exercise of power. Lukes (2005) expands the definition and scope of power by asserting it goes beyond the scope deliberate action:

It is, in the first place, very far from obvious that the states of mind in question - desires and beliefs that endorse and even celebrate conforming to norms that are against one’s interests or that express resignation to one’s fate - are ‘essentially by-products’, inherently incapable of being deliberately inculcated. Unlike Elster, I cannot see why such outcomes cannot be the outcome of ‘manipulation’, though of course, I agree that one must have evidence for such a claim: one should not be lead into simply assuming that resignation generally is induced by those who benefit from it. But, second, as I have repeatedly insisted, to focus on manipulation by defining the concept of power as deliberate intervention is unduly to narrow its scope. Power can be at work, inducing compliance by influencing desires and beliefs, without being “intelligent and intentional” (Lukes, 2005, p. 136).

It’s the contrast between the norms one conforms to and the interests of one holds, especially the interests that are not articulated, is a lens through which the exercise of third dimensional power may be detected.

This research supports the assertion that such outcomes can be the direct result of manipulation. As Lukes (2005) stated, “What concerns us here, whether or not it is religiously induced or encouraged, is the shaping of agents desires and beliefs by factors external to those agents” (p. 134). In what ways can the connection between the interests, resignations, and beliefs identified in this study be understood as desired outcomes, whether intentional and by design or
unintentional? The defensive mythology in this study was largely focused on a small group of teachers, in contrast to the administration. Council members felt that their colleagues were compelled to teach the curriculum in order to avoid sanctions and stay in good standing. They focused their frustrations on colleagues rather than the curriculum director and created a less-than complimentary social category around these colleagues, largely sparing the administration from a negative characterization. They identified the curriculum as having merit even if they wanted to believe that adopting it was unnecessary. By assigning a status function to a group of teachers, the administration was largely insulated from being the focus of defensive bias and yet still benefited from aspects of those same beliefs. This study illustrates a strong connection between direct action by the administration and emergent belief structures that were a direct result of those actions that shaped the interests of the teachers. It also refutes critics who claim that these beliefs structures and resignations are simply byproducts and not a direct result of being subjected to power.

Finally, this research supports Searle’s (2010) refute of critics who have stated that his theory of status functions does not apply to relationships between individuals or groups in social organizations because, in many cases, would-be status function acceptance operators do not approve of relationship. This would be in opposition to status functions assigned to objects (e.g., money, borders) or status functions as certifications (e.g., driver’s licenses, medical licenses) but not status functions as enablements. According to Searle, all status functions bottom out in the individual. He refuted the notion that approval by the individual is necessary for a status function to be a reality. The status function described in this study would be categorized as an enablement. The subcommittee was not authorized to exercise power by meeting a set of requirements that certified them as subcommittee members by society in general or by a
mutually agreed upon standard. A central authority enabled them with the powers assigned to them by being chosen by that authority. Based on the trends in the data, it is clear that the council members did not approve of this arrangement. However, it can be the case that they approved of the status function, or approved of the nature of the arrangement of a status function, in which individuals would have a relationship to deontic powers. However, as with many or all status functions categorized as enablements, it is possible that they accepted that the subcommittee had these powers and accepted the acts of the subcommittee as real and salient but certainly did not approve of those aspects of the status function. The attenuating myths described in this study were focused on groups and individuals found within the status function but not on the concept that a small group may have the power to perform the very same acts. In fact, some participants missed the days when they held a high status during previous adoptions. Despite a lack of approval, I believe this study supports Searle’s contention that status functions, as with all institutional facts, can exist within the confines of collective intentionality without collective approval.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

This study focused on a specific phenomenon: the adoption and enactment of a new reading curriculum at the elementary level in one school district. The limitations of this study included the small number of participants, the nature of the data collection, and the analysis and nature of phenomenological study that limits the ability to generalize these results to a broader context. A quantitative or mixed-methods approach to research that could investigate the nature of status functions as enablements during curriculum decision-making and teachers’ defensive bias in a broader context would be an interesting investigation. Notably, a study designed to investigate the connection between the length of service for status function creation operators,
acceptance operators, and the predicted levels of sustained innovation would help confirm or debunk the conclusion that failed innovations in schools are connected to disrupted status functions and residual defensive bias. Is there a positive correlation between the length of service of curriculum leaders and the length of time innovations survive that were adopted under their leadership? What is the nature of the balance between the forces that create the inertia of a new innovation and the defensive bias that counteracts that inertia?

It would be interesting to see if similar phenomenon in other districts could also be described as status functions, with binding operational decisions and status declarations surrounding curricula decision-making. However, it would be highly beneficial to revisit this same district at one or several points in the future to learn if this process is truly part of an ongoing cycle. Some authors have proposed that there is a strong link between the nature of status function and autopoiesis in order to describe how values, standards, beliefs, and practices can endure in organizations over years and decades. What would happen when a new leader arrived with the authority to enable a new group of teachers with deontic power? Would the same process repeat again the next time an attempt was made at adopting and enacting a new curricula? Is there a change in the collective intentionality of the teachers, first focusing jointly on the goals of the organization and then focusing jointly on the facts, the realness of the myths, and the language of their thoughts?
References


Appendix A: Departmental Permission and Consent Form

- **Eastern Michigan University**
- **Education First**

October 4, 2012

To: Mr. Les Sharon Jr.
Department of Leadership and Counseling

Re: UHSRC #120901
Approval Date: October 4, 2012

Category: Approved Expedited Research Project

Title: Curriculum Implementation: A Study of Power Relationships and Implementation Fidelity in One Michigan School District

The Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee (UHSRC) has completed their review of your project. I am pleased to advise you that your expedited research has been approved in accordance with federal regulations.

Renewals: Expedited protocols need to be renewed annually. If the project is continuing, please submit the Human Subjects Continuation Form prior to the approval expiration. If the project is completed, please submit the Human Subjects Study Completion Form (both forms are found on the UHSRC website).

Revisions: Expedited protocols do require revisions. If changes are made to a protocol, please submit a Human Subjects Minor Modification Form or new Human Subjects Approval Request Form (if major changes) for review (see UHSRC website for forms).

Problems: If issues should arise during the conduct of the research, such as unanticipated problems, adverse events, or any problem that may increase the risk to human subjects and change the category of review, notify the UHSRC office within 24 hours. Any complaints from participants regarding the risk and benefits of the project must be reported to the UHSRC.

Follow-up: If your expedited research project is not completed and closed after three years, the UHSRC office will require a new Human Subjects Approval Request Form prior to approving a continuation beyond three years.

Please use the UHSRC number listed above on any forms submitted that relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the UHSRC office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 734-487-0042 or via e-mail at human.subjects@emich.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Deb de Laski-Smith, Ph.D.
Administrative Co-Chair
University Human Subjects Review Committee
Project Title: Curriculum Implementation: A Study of Power Relationships and Implementation Fidelity in One Michigan School District

Investigator: Lester C. Sharon Jr., Eastern Michigan University

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of curriculum implementation from the classroom teachers’ perspective and to shed light on the shared experiences of several teachers currently involved in the first year implementation of a new reading curriculum.

Procedure: The researcher will explain the study to you, answer any questions you may have, and witness your signature to this consent form. You must have at least five years teaching experience and have participated in the first year of the Reader’s Workshop curriculum to take part in this study. Your participation will involve at least three interviews with the researcher over several weeks or months. Each interview will last for approximately 45-60 minutes. Questions will relate to your experiences and perceptions with the implementation. You may be asked to suggest others who you believe would be beneficial to participate in this research.

Upon completing the interviews, you will be given a duplicate copy of this informed consent, which includes follow-up contact information, if needed.

Confidentiality: Only an alias will identify your interview responses. The name of the district and all participants will also have an alias assigned. The results will be stored separately from the consent form, which includes your name and any other identifying information. At no time will you name be associated with your responses to the interview questions. All related materials and transcripts will be kept in the researcher’s office away from campus and all electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer that is not the property of the school district or shared with the district’s network.

Recording of Interviews: All interviews will be recorded on digital recording devices and transcribed. By signing this consent agreement you are giving permission to be recorded.

Expected Risks: There are no foreseeable risks to you by participating in the interviews, as all results will be kept completely confidential.

Expected Benefits: There will be no direct personal benefit to you, but your participation will contribute to our understanding of the relationships and factors that surround curriculum implementation. Future readers will hopefully gain insight into implementation from the classroom teachers’ perspective and will use this information to improve their processes.
Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you do decide to participate, you can change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study without negative consequences.

Use of Research Results: Results will be presented in narrative form only. No names or individually identifying information will be revealed. Results may be presented at research meetings and conferences, in scientific publications, and as part of a doctoral dissertation being conducted by the principal investigator.

Future Questions: If you have any questions concerning your participation in this study now or in the future, you can contact the principal investigator, Les Sharon, at (734-277-0391) or via e-mail (owlfarm@yahoo.com). This research protocol and informed consent document has been reviewed and approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee for use from 9/1/2012 to 9/1/2012. If you have questions about the approval process, please contact the Director of the Graduate School (734.487.0042), (human.subjects@emich.edu).

Consent to Participate: I have read or had read to me all of the above information about this research study, including the research procedures, possible risks, side effects, and the likelihood of any benefit to me. The content and meaning of this information has been explained and I understand. All my questions, at this time, have been answered. I hereby consent and do voluntarily offer to follow the study requirements and take part in the study.