

The Unscripted

Series

Topic:
Education

About

There are scripts running all the time in the classroom that tell us how to act, what to say, what's right and what isn't. In education these scripts are often referred to as the curriculum. The curriculum represents the formal resources that have been explicitly chosen to help students learn (E.g. Official textbooks or lesson plans). But a lesser known curriculum is also simultaneously operating in the background. This quiet script has been dubbed the "hidden curriculum" by several educators to describe the unintentional side effects of what we've chosen to teach. In the sections below, we hope to help you consider what has been excluded from the scripts that teach students how to live. We know that you can only cover so much material in the limited amount of time you have with your students. You don't need to try to tackle everything in order to become a little more conscious of how the educational system operates. You can just start by reflecting on your own teaching practices and if we can help you do that - we will have achieved a major goal toward unpacking the power of scripts not only for your students but for you too!

What?

In the sections below we want to help educators examine their own culturally responsive teaching practices as well as to provide some resources to better prepare students for life and work in the 21st Century. This includes, but is not limited to, modeling formative skills like critical thinking, communication, creativity and collaboration (The 4 C's) which are critical skills that students must possess in order to understand how our society works and how to responsibly engage the systems and structures that form them and control their access to resources. An educational system that effectively prepares students for 21st Century life and work in an increasingly multicultural society must not only value different cultural contributions and expressions in teaching and learning but must recognize that diversity is in fact vital for educational excellence. As a system, education scripts pictures of success and upward mobility that formatively shape who students are and who they are becoming. To root out racism within these scripts, educators must carefully analyze what is being communicated and how they are impacting students of color.

So What?

It is undeniable that racial bias and prejudice has limited access to education for minority groups in our nation's history. The socio-economic impact that this has had on our society over the years can't be understated. Everyone loses when individuals and communities are unable to get an education, diversity their social capital and become more upwardly mobile. When shared racial biases and prejudices morph into powerful ideologies education systems exclude and silence the voices of under-represented cultural communities. For too long, students of color have struggled to see themselves achieve life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness through education. Access to the American dream for some has frequently come at the expense of alienating others. For example, in 1862, Congress took the first of several related actions in passing the Morrill Land Grant Act that gave states federal land to support the establishment of colleges, yet these segregated institutions primarily served white communities. In 1944, the GI Bill was passed to give veterans of the WWII funds for college, unemployment and housing. However, 95 percent of Black veterans who tried to take advantage of the GI Bill for higher education were diverted to mostly unaccredited Black colleges— that were, according to Erin Blakemore "underfunded and overwhelmed by the influx of new students". Overwhelmed by applicants, these Black institutions were forced to turn away tens of thousands of veterans. Historian Hilary Herbold writes of the GI Bill, "Though Congress granted all soldiers the same benefits theoretically the segregationist principles of almost every institution of higher learning effectively disbarred a huge proportion of Black veterans from earning a college degree." Education must expose students to these kinds of stories that have been omitted from the curriculum. Sometimes this will be very difficult for dominate groups because they most likely have benefited from the narrative outcome. However, privilege is arguably the ability to continue to avoid these types of uncomfortable conversations and educators must arrest this by creating spaces that both challenge and support students as they interrogate the scripts given to them and work to imagine more truthful narratives about the world and their role in it.

Now What?

Here are some additional resources to help you take action:

- Explore the Multicultural Awareness Project for Institutional Transformation (MAP IT) at the University of Minnesota's General College: https://www.cehd.umn.edu/crdeul/pdf/map_it.pdf
- Survey your educational institution to determine if there are spaces established that support students of color toward educational success.
- What kind of inclusive programs, courses or practices exist at your institution that support students of color?
- What kind of programs introduce students of color to culturally representative mentors and role models?
- Read the "Mis-Education of the Negro" published in 1933 by Dr. Carter G. Woodson (You can listen to the first chapter for free on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ublXaubx21Y>)
- Consider this activity on cultural relativism and ethnocentricity https://aace-english.com/free-lessons/world-religions/ADV_Ethnocentrism_or_Cultural_Relativism.pdf
- Consider "My Multicultural Self" exercise <https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/my-multicultural-self>
- For discussion... Ask your students if they believe that there should be different systems of education for different children or a common unified education for all? Is education a right or a "private good" that is "publicly provided"? Should Americans be able to opt out and if so what should that look like?
- "How the GI Bill's Promise was Denied to a Million WWII Black Veterans" <https://www.history.com/news/gi-bill-black-wwii-veterans-benefits>