

The Unscripted

Series

Topic:
Education

About

There are scripts running all the time in our society that tell us how to act, what to say, what's right and what isn't. Sociologists describe these scripts as social norms or mores which determine what is acceptable or unacceptable in any given culture. These norms are often represented in different types of social contracts. Some contracts are very formal in that they spell out explicit expectations and rules that govern the expectations and acceptable actions of stakeholders or citizens (E.g. Laws or legal documents). Other scripts like "the status quo" are much more informal and sometimes even go unspoken. Make no mistake, however, the status quo is still a very powerful force in creating, maintaining and perpetuating a state of affairs that governs how individuals and groups relate to each other. In the sections below, we hope to help you reconsider what is "normal" and "acceptable". We know that we will only scratch the surface, but if we can help you become a little more conscious of how bias or prejudice operates in our social contracts that influence our expectations and behaviors we will have taken a significant step toward unpacking the power of scripts in our society.

What?

In the sections below we want to examine 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 dominant 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:

- Attend a public school board meeting and ask if there are spaces established that support students of color for educational success.
- What kind of inclusive programs or practices exist in your community that support students of color?
- Start an adopt a classroom project through your local neighborhood association or public school foundation to provide resources for students of color to learn "The 4 C's"
- 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=ubIXaubx2IY>)
- 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
- 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 personal reflection...Should there 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>