

The Unscripted

Series

Topic:
Policing

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 is very familiar to educators. It represents the formal resources that have been explicitly chosen to help students learn (E.g. Official textbooks or lesson plans). But a lesser known "hidden curriculum" is also simultaneously operating in the background. This quiet script describes 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 your formal curriculum. We know that you can only cover so much material in the limited amount of time you have with your students. We know you can't tackle everything, but if we can help you become a little more conscious of how bias or prejudice operates - we will have achieved a major goal toward unpacking the power of scripts in both the formal and hidden curriculum not only for your students, but for you too!

What?

For the purposes of this project, our focus rests on how students of color are exposed to the role of police within the justice system. As the civil arm of the government to enforce laws and keep public order and safety, the police are the subject of many formative scripts in children's lives from a very early age. From mimicking concepts of good and bad in playing childhood games like "cops and robbers" - to more graphic depictions of justice and violence served on TV and film screens. Undeniably children and youth of color are barraged with scripts about the police but they need adult mentors and teachers to help them make sense of what they are experiencing. To dig deeper, educators must consider developmentally appropriate ways to prepare students for navigating different types of encounters with the police. In order to do this, educators must question how justice, and its enforcement, is treated in the formal curriculum. Perhaps you will need to supplement what students' are formally being exposed to as it relates to racial interactions with police. Regardless of the racial composition of your students, the intersection of justice system with minority communities in society is essential to preparing responsible citizens.

So What?

In classrooms across the country, racial bias and prejudice is created, maintained and perpetuated through powerful scripts that are deployed in both the formal and hidden curriculum. According to a 2019 Pew Research Center survey, the majority of black and white Americans believe that black people are treated less fairly than whites in dealing with the police and the criminal justice system as a whole. Throughout our country's history, shared racial biases and prejudices have morph into powerful ideologies that have directly affected our understandings of enforcing justice and policing. The collective impact that racial profiling has had over the years to skewing justice in America can't be understated. Of particular concern is the increasingly blurred line between police and military action. While both systems are weaponized the goals, tactics and outcomes ought to significantly differ between the police and the military. However, this is not always apparent. One powerful example can be found in the 1985 domestic airstrike order against a Black liberation group by the Philadelphia police that killed eleven people, including five children and burned an entire Philadelphia neighborhood reducing 61 homes to ashes and displacing 250 residents. Over 500 police officers took part in the operation against the MOVE - a Black Liberation group that occupied the building the bomb was dropped on. Today, scenes of police SWOT teams in riot gear with military grade weapons continue to circulate through the media as protestors take to the streets to protest racial inequities and police brutality. Students are not immune from this exposure and need safe places to ask questions and share their emotions - especially students known to have had negative encounters with the police in the past. Schools and universities must help student's understand that it is considered illegal to resist or fight the orders of a police officer. If negative emotions get the better of them when they encounter the police, it could place them in harm's way.

Now What?

Here are some additional resources for consideration and discussion:

- "The day police bombed a city street: can scars of 1985 MOVE atrocity be healed?" <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/may/10/move-1985-bombing-reconciliation-philadelphia>
- Pew Research Center "10 things we know about race and policing in the U.S.": <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/06/03/10-things-we-know-about-race-and-policing-in-the-u-s/>
- Boston Globe article, "The statistical paradox of police killings" by Aubrey Clayton: <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/06/11/opinion/statistical-paradox-police-killings/>
- "What Exposes African Americans to Police Violence?" by Devon W. Corbato and Patrick Rock: https://harvardcrcl.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2009/06/HLC104_crop.pdf
- "The military and the police aren't the same thing": <https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/letters/ct-the-military-and-the-police-arent-the-same-thing-20150729-story.html>
- "Get Home Alive: Black Families Grapple With Teaching Kids How to De-Escalate Police Encounters" <https://www.insideedition.com/get-home-alive-black-families-grapple-with-teaching-kids-how-to-de-escalate-police-encounters-60700>