



Decriminalizing Education

Curriculum Unit 18.01.01, published September 2018
by Kalah Bell

Introduction

Schools are a valuable and frequently neglected place for studying children's introductions to the juvenile justice system. Schools impart behavioral norms and expectations, and they provide passports for future academic and professional undertakings, both of which can be a predictor of the probability that youth become involved with the justice system. The reality is that far too often schools fail our youth by putting them on a path to prison rather than putting them on a path to becoming a productive, law-abiding contributing citizen to society. Experts in the field have argued that the ways in which schools identify and react to students' misbehavior can increase youths' risk of subsequent punishment, including involvement in the justice system. This tends to happen when students are suspended or expelled from schools, denied fundamental educational and social services, and referred to law enforcement for what are often minor transgressions. Hence, when students are regularly suspended, fail academically, habitually truant and have social, emotional, and educational needs neglected by the school, they become entangled in the criminal justice system. This phenomenon is referred to as the "school-to-prison-pipeline."

In an effort to counteract this phenomenon, advocates, scholars, teachers and other education professionals have started to consider what determinants put youth at risk of school discipline, as well as strategies that schools, districts, and policy makers could seek to disassemble this pipeline. Research consistently indicates that schools with positive, inclusive school climates have less crime and dysfunction than others. Essentially, behavior problems are lower in schools where students feel respected and listened to and where students feel intimate connections to teachers and other staff; when schools are a place of love, respect and involvement, they perform in a more positive way. In fact, sharp punishments, stringent security, and denial of services that comprise the pipeline to prison cripple attempts to create a positive school social climate. Additionally, because excessive discipline results in removal from class or school and students missed instructional time, it has a negative impact on student performance during standardized testing.

The purpose of this instructional unit is to deepen my students' understanding of the harsh realities of the school-to-prison pipeline construct and teach them to apply principles of activism and policy making to support a dismantling of this system. The goal is to help students to become aware of the pitfalls that exist within their own schools that could ultimately lead them down a path to incarceration and to show them how to avoid those pitfalls and how to overcome adversity and become a voice of support for other marginalized

members of their school and community.

Demographics

I serve as the 8th grade academy special education inclusion teacher for ELA and Math at the Washington Metropolitan Opportunity Academy, located in NW Washington DC. I should also mention that the 8th grade academy was exclusively created for the districts over-aged and repeat 8th graders that could no longer attend their neighborhood middle school. Wash Met is a low-income, low-performing school with an enrollment of 125 students of which 97% are African American. Like many urban schools, Wash Met suffers from an epidemic of violence where many students experience emotional and physical trauma. Furthermore, an overwhelming portion of our students have come in contact with or are currently caught up in the juvenile justice system. Many students struggle to get to school due to trouble at home or with the law. As a result truancy is high at Wash Met and arguably the schools biggest challenge. Historically, students have tested well below grade level in both ELA and Math. I have only been at Wash Met for one year but have learned that my students respond best to a positive, structured, rigorous classroom, with hands-on activities and increased student teacher interactions. This unit is nestled between mending and teaching and because of the potentially sensitive nature of the unit, I will dedicate some time to building relationships among students and teachers.

Content Objectives

Although the theme of my unit is focused on the harsh realities of the school-to-prison pipeline, the goal is to help students to become aware of the pitfalls that exist within their own schools that could ultimately lead them down a path to incarceration and to show them how to not only avoid those pitfalls but how to overcome adversity and become a voice of support for other marginalized members of their school and community. This is an exciting curriculum that introduces youth to the lives and work of people who look like them, come from similar backgrounds, have had some of the same experiences with school and/or the juvenile system, and have beat the odds and became warriors for their family and community. This curriculum will also empower its learners by giving them a voice in their schools' disciplinary code of conduct. I have developed this curriculum to be interactive and innovative for at risk students and juvenile offenders between the ages of 12 and 21. It travels through the life stories of 3 people who have encountered the criminal justice system and examines the strategies they employed to overcome problems in their lives and their communities. My curriculum will allow my students to dig into their own identities and re-examine the choices they made in the past. Additionally, this curriculum is designed to meet the needs of at risk youth, and the challenges of adults that work with them. By cultivating positive identity development, high frequency of teacher and student interactions, healthy peer relations, responsibility, avoidance of dangerous behaviors, communication skills, and tools for goal setting, students will become capable of overcoming obstacles, and will develop confidence in the belief that they can successfully transition back into their mainstream comprehensive schools and communities. It is my hope that through the examination of others who have been caught up in the juvenile justice system and have overcome such adversities that my students will come to realize that their

current situation does not have to be their final destination. Additionally, I will provide my students with the school-to-prison pipeline content needed to understand not only its origin but where it stands today and how their lives are directly impacted by it. For the culminating project for this unit, students will give an oral presentation on their findings and ways that their school can help to dismantle the pipeline to the 8th grade school administrator, teachers and peers.

Unit Content

In 1899 the first juvenile court in the US was established. The juvenile system is designed to address crimes allegedly committed by young people. A juvenile found guilty of violating the law is commonly called a juvenile delinquent.

American society has dealt with juveniles who commit crimes in many different ways at different times throughout US History. However, three prevailing trends surfaced. First, youth who break the law must be held accountable for their actions. Second, youth are typically dealt with differently from adults. For example, children under the age of eighteen have not developed to full maturation to vote, smoke, sign contracts, serve in the military or marry(1). Equivalently, juvenile delinquents routinely face a different kind of criminal justice process. At times it has been more severe than the adult process but generally it is more considerate and forgiving. Often the accountability looks and feels like punishment and sometimes it's rehabilitation, but typically both. Third, black youths are disproportionately detained in juvenile detention centers. From start to finish, the controversy over the best way to sanction, punish control and improve the lives of juveniles who have broke the law has been emianate.

Alongside that controversy is the ongoing controversy surrounding the policies that encourage police presence at schools, harsh tactics including physical restraint, and automatic punishments that end in suspensions and out-of-class time as major contributors to the school-to-prison pipeline.

The school-to-prison pipeline begins and can end in the classroom. The bottom line, in combination with zero-tolerance policies, a teacher's decision to refer students for punishment which results in being forced out the classroom are much more likely to be introduced to the criminal justice system. Students of racial minorities and students with disabilities are disproportionately represented in the school-to-prison pipeline. Black students, for instance, are 3.5 times more likely than their white classmates to be suspended or expelled, according to a nationwide study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. Unfortunately, results for students with disabilities are just as disturbing. One report shows that while 8.6 percent of public school children have been identified as having disabilities that affect their ability to learn, these students make up 32 percent of youth inside juvenile detention centers. The racial disparities are more blunt for students with disabilities. Approximately 1 in 4 black children with disabilities were suspended at least once, versus 1 in 11 white students, according to an analysis of the government report by Daniel J. Losen, director of the Center for Civil Rights Project at UCLA.

A landmark study was done by the CSG Justice Center, in partnership with the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas&AM University and it tracked almost 1 million Texas public secondary school students for at least six years. The study revealed that African Americans were disproportionately punished compared with otherwise similar white and Latino students. Moreover, the study found that when students are suspended or expelled,

the likelihood that they will repeat a grade, not graduate and/or become involved in the juvenile justice system increases significantly.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the amount of school resource officers went up from 38 percent between 1997 and 2007. Jerri Katzerman, Student Press Law Center deputy legal director, believes that this influx of police on school grounds has aided to criminalize many students and fill the pipeline. Not to mention, an ample amount of these arrests are for nonviolent offenses. In most cases, the students are misbehaving by being disruptive. Also, a recent U.S. Department of Education study shows that 70 percent of students arrested in school-related incidents or referred to law enforcement are black or hispanic. Data supports the notion that zero-tolerance policies and one-size-fits-all punishments for a range of behaviors, have fueled these trends and the pipeline.

On the bright side, juvenile crime rates are falling hard and fast! The number of Americans in juvenile detention has gone down. Although the US still leads the industrialized world in the rate in which we lock up our young people, the youth detention rate in this country has dropped significantly. Since 1995 up until 2010, the rate of youth in detention dropped by 41 percent.

But school discipline policies are going in the opposite direction. Reports show that out-of-school suspensions have increased about 10 percent since 2000 and they have more than doubled since the 1970's. Black students are three times more likely to be suspended or expelled than whites, according to the Education Department's Office of Civil rights.

Additionally, according to the findings of The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the study showed that African-American youth are nearly 5 times as likely to be detained as their white peers. Also, in 2010 only 1 of every 4 detained youth was locked up based on a Violent Crime Index offense (homicide, aggravated assault, robbery or sexual abuse). As a matter of fact, 40 percent of juvenile detentions are due to technical violations of probation, drug possession, low-level property offenses, public order offenses and status offenses. Basically, activities that would not be considered crimes as adults, such as possession of alcohol and truancy. Thus, most young people are detained on the basis of offenses that are not clear threats to the public.

In light of these facts, there has been growing concerns amongst school districts, educators, youth advocates and the Obama administration, that schools are suspending students too much and need to find alternative disciplinary actions. The reason that school discipline is a rapidly growing concern is because of the glaring connection between the juvenile justice system and school discipline. Especially for older students, problems at school can lead to their first encounter with the juvenile justice system. Unfortunately, even when schools are not purposely sending students into the juvenile justice system, disciplining them makes it more likely that they will end up there. The Texas study found that, of students disciplined in middle or high school, 23 percent of them ended up in contact with a juvenile probation officer, that number sits at 2 percent for those students who were not disciplined. By the same token, students who have been expelled are three times more likely to come in contact with the juvenile justice system the following year than the students who did not.

The education department is encouraging schools to change their discipline policy. During the previous Obama administration, an investigation was launched to look into the civil rights implications of schools' discipline policies, and recommended that schools restructure their discipline systems so that expulsion and suspension are avoided when possible. Sadly, this attempt by the Education Department and the Department of Justice, has been met with resistance because the guidance for the necessary changes is based on "disparate impact." Basically, if a policy does not mention race and is applied equally to all students of all races, the federal government dictates that schools should not use it if the consequences fall

disproportionately on students of a specific race. Case in point, if a school had a policy that all students who were caught using cell phones in class received an out-of-school suspension and that school ended up suspending a disproportionate number of Hispanic students as a result of the policy, the federal government would encourage the school to come up with another way to reach the same goal (cell phone free classroom) without removing the students from class. Understandably, some argue that schools will become extremely disruptive if teachers and administrators are not able to remove disruptive students from the class.

Some of the nation's school districts are taking discipline policies into their own hands by coming up with alternative ways to punish students besides suspension, they are trying to change the culture of discipline so that students aren't referred to the police. Some large school districts are pulling back from zero tolerance policies. For example, Broward County, Florida, one of the largest school districts in the country, decided in 2013 that school personnel, not police, would deal with students' nonviolent misdemeanors. The Chicago Public Schools are trying to see a decrease in the amount of suspensions by allowing for some leniency in situations where students could be suspended for the use of their cell phones and ending suspensions for children younger than second grade. In Los Angeles, students under the age of 13 will not be referred to police for minor infractions, this came about after police distributed 552 tickets to preteens during the 2013-14 school year. Meanwhile, New York schools are taking a more focused approach. Recently, the city has disclosed plans to reconstruct its school discipline code. If the revisions are accepted, school principals will have to get the city Department of Education's permission to suspend any student for "insubordination," or for any suspension of a student in third grade or younger. Also, it would no longer be an option to give a "superintendent's suspension" (a more serious level of suspension) to students involved in "minor physical altercations." Other school districts across the nation are delving into restorative justice practices that place an emphasis on forming relationships between teachers, students and administrators and giving students a chance to resolve problems by taking accountability for their actions and talking out their disagreements. The Oakland School District in California and other districts nationwide have been using this approach for many years and have reported a decline in their suspension rates.

This unit will give my students an opportunity to have a voice, they will learn how to self-advocate for an improved school discipline policy that can potentially save their lives and/or the lives of their peers. I will introduce the concept of the school-to-prison pipeline and activate students background knowledge by showing them a documentary titled "Innocent Until Proven Guilty," a captivating documentary that introduces James Forman Jr., a thirty-one year old public defender in Washington DC. The film follows both his role as a public defender and as a teacher at an alternative high school for juvenile ex-offenders, which he co-founded. Forman utilizes his acute awareness of the judicial system, his understanding of the street life and his commitment to the African-American community, to help at-risk youth move forward in the right direction. The Pulitzer Prize winner's work has distinct relevance now, when the number of young black men overseen by the criminal justice systems supervision has risen to a stand-out one in three. His movement against the criminalization of black juveniles is a gripping example of hopefulness in action.

In an effort to break this bond between schools and the justice system, it is important to acknowledge and recognize the changes in the beliefs and processes of school discipline that have compiled over the past generation. Moreover, correcting this obvious crisis of the school-to-prison pipeline should be a top priority in the national education reform movement. It is important to point out that discipline has always been paramount in our country's public school system but in the 1990's a shift in how schools conceptualize, recognize and respond to student misbehavior took place. Together, these changes are the components of the school-to-prison pipeline. In the 1970's, keeping kids out of school as a punishment was a rarity, fewer than 4 percent of students were suspended in 1973, according to an analysis of Education Department data by the

Southern Poverty Law Center. Understandably, increased concerns about crime and violence in schools caused states and districts to adopt discipline policies that called for suspension. One of these policies is The Gun-Free Schools Act. This act was passed in 1994 and it mandated a year of out-of-school suspension for any student caught bringing a weapon to school. Naturally, as states began to embrace these zero-tolerance policies, the amount of suspensions and expulsions increased. Obviously, zero-tolerance policies are not the only reason suspensions and expulsions became more commonplace. While the enforcement of zero-tolerance was taking place in order to address the growing concerns about school crime and violence, school districts were endorsing their interpretation of the broken windows theory of policing. This theory stresses the significance of being tough on the small offenses in order to help students feel safer and intimidate other students from committing more serious crimes. Yet, in schools this looked like more suspensions for behaviors that did not warrant such a consequence. Another significant change was the introduction of surveillance and security devices, such as surveillance cameras, metal detectors, secured doors/gates at the schools' perimeter or directly within the school building itself. Historically, these security devices were found in criminal justice systems, not schools. Another is the growing dependence on exclusionary discipline that remove students from schools or classrooms, for example, out of school suspensions, in-school suspensions and expulsions. A fourth shift presented itself when a connection between formal criminal justice systems and schools strengthened. This shift is an obvious and dominant one, the increase of police in schools also known as school resource officers (SRO). From 1997 to 2007, the number of SRO's increased by nearly a third. Supposedly, SRO's were there to stop mass school shootings like the one at Santa Fe High School in Texas in 2018. In other words, they should be protecting our students not policing them. When a school permits a School Resource Officer to arrest a student or less harshly and more commonly, refer a student to juvenile court as a form of punishment, they are turning that student over to the criminal justice system, fueling the pipeline. Thus, it makes it much easier for a student to get a juvenile record, even if the punishment for a first offense is lenient, the punishment for the second offense is likely to be much more harsh. Sadly, schools are more likely now than ever to rely on formal punishment, and have tight bonds to the criminal justice agencies. As the current situation stands, students face suspension, expulsion or arrest for misbehaviors that at one time resulted in detention or oral punishment from the dean or principal. Black students are suspended or expelled three times more often than whites. Although black students only consisted of 16 percent of all enrolled children in 2011-12, according to federal statistics, black students accounted for 31 percent of all in-school arrests.

Experts say that these disparities begin as early as preschool. One 2014 study done by a Columbia University researcher found that five-year-old boys whose fathers had been incarcerated were considerably less behaviorally prepared for school than five-year-olds whose fathers had not been incarcerated. Thus, making them more likely to be placed in special education classes for their behavior problems. The landmark study of Texas discipline policies found that 97 percent of school suspensions were the choice of school administration. Only 3 percent of students had broken a rule that called for a mandatory suspension. Not only that, these discretionary suspensions hit black students particularly hard.

Many studies have examined the relationship between race, behavior and suspension and none have supporting evidence that suggest that black students misbehave at higher rates. A study in 2002 found that white students were more likely to be disciplined for documentable offenses such as smoking, vandalism and use of profanity. On the other hand, black students were more likely to be disciplined for more objective reasons, such as disrespect.

In an effort to counteract these sweeping and damning changes, advocates, scholars, teachers and other education professionals have started to consider what determinants put youth at risk of school discipline, as

well as strategies that schools, districts, and policy makers could seek to disassemble this pipeline. Research consistently indicates that schools with positive, inclusive school climates have less crime and dysfunction than others. Essentially, behavior problems are lower in schools where students feel respected and listened to, and where students feel intimate connections to teachers and other staff; when schools are a place of love, respect and involvement, students perform in a more positive way. In fact, sharp punishments, stringent security, and denial of services that comprise the pipeline to prison cripple attempts to create a positive school social climate. Additionally, because excessive discipline results in removal from class or school, missed instructional time and poor academic performance on standardized test.

It is also important to acknowledge the helpfulness of this metaphor. In a circumstance like the school-to-prison-pipeline, a metaphor can eliminate lengthy, dense academic language into a concept that people can easily understand and recall. In this case, that excessive school punishment, stiff security, and neglect of students' needs can increase the likelihood that youth go to prison. However, this metaphor is not without limitations. It is slightly off base in the sense that it downplays the complexities of the process. The relationship between the schools and prison pipeline is more indirect and less certain than the metaphor proposes. Rather, few students are arrested in schools, although one is too many. Generally, students who are arrested in school, alternatively are given out of school suspension, or other school consequences. The majority of students who are arrested have their cases dismissed, received a suspended sentence or receive supervision such as probation because school-based arrests are usually minor offenses. In lieu of going to jail, as the pipeline metaphor suggests, students who find themselves entangled in school punishment experience countless consequences that negatively affect their futures but do not always directly lead to prison. They miss classroom time and become less likely to graduate, they are excluded from mentoring and counseling in favor of punishment, during suspension or expulsion they have more time and chance to get involved in mischief, their records and limited academic history puts them at a disadvantage in terms of employment opportunities, and so on. Although the school-to-prison pipeline is slightly inaccurate, it dramatically activates public attention to a very severe problem.

This unit will afford my students the opportunity to take a glimpse into lives of three individuals who have had some direct contact with the juvenile system and/or the criminal system but were able to defy the odds. Allen Iverson a retired NBA basketball player, Jim Saint Germain co-author of "A Stone for Hope" and social entrepreneur and youth advocate and Alisa a 23 year old youth specialist helping at-risk reclaim their futures. Visualizing for the sake of developing multiple ways to deal with America's egregious criminal justice system can only happen if we listen and learn from people who have experienced it. Students will be able to follow these individuals' personal journey through the system and explain how they were able to escape its usual outcomes. Allen Iverson, for example, one of the more complex athletes in the sports arena that comes from humble beginnings. Sports enthusiasts and fans alike have witnessed Iverson show his frustration on the court with his explosive outburst over frivolous misunderstandings. However, his impulsive behaviors both on and off the court are a clear sign of the pain and suffering he has had to endure on his journey to basketball stardom and beyond. Iverson's heart, willpower and drive to be a stand out pushed through the television screen. In order to understand how Iverson came to be the person that spectators witnessed on the basketball court, my students will complete a case study analysis to learn why he was always been so guarded, misrepresented and resilient. Students will learn that you do not get to a successful place in life without trials and tribulations.

Iverson was incarcerated in September of 1993. At the time, Iverson's reputation as a local celebrity destined for basketball hall of fame greatness caused him to be recognized and eventually accused of participating in a bowling alley altercation between local patrons and white patrons from neighboring Poquoson, Virginia.

Iverson says in a documentary “ If you’re from Virginia then you know that some white people from Poquoson do not like black people.” Ultimately, this bowling alley brawl led to Allen going to trial as an adult and he was incarcerated on a 15-year sentence with 10-years suspended. Iverson spent four months at the Newport News City Correctional facility. Allen was not even out of high school but was serving time as an adult. The community stood behind him and marched for him. Iverson’s story became national news and eventually Virginia Governor Douglas Wilder granted clemency to Iverson after four months in prison.

Iverson told CBSSports.com about his decision to channel his frustrations into realizing his dream. “The only thing I could do was give up or keep fighting for what I wanted in life. My dream was bigger than anything else. My fight and me wanting to fulfill what I wanted to be in life. That was enough to keep me strong enough to endure anything.” Allen completed his high school education at a school for at-risk students. His mother convinced John Thompson of Georgetown University to give Allen a second chance and Iverson says it was that second chance from Coach Thompson that made him realize his dream of being in the NBA was still possible.

Iverson’s story is one with many twist and turns, ups and downs, trials and tribulations and most importantly hope, determination and a blueprint of how to overcome adversity. Moreover, his story is a powerful confirmation for youth caught up in the pipeline, at-risk youth and the adults who work with this extraordinary population because if you are a child you see what can happen when you overcome adversity and if you’re a parent, coach, teacher or a mentor, you see what happens when you take time and nurture a child.

Jim Saint Germain, a immigrant from Hati, came to Brooklyn, New York with his parents when he was ten years old. Like Iverson, Saint Germain encompassed some of those habits of success that are needed to surpass life’s obstacles. Jim had heart, determination and resilience and he needed it because he was being raised in a Brooklyn neighborhood that was plagued with violence. As a kid everywhere he went kids were trying to jump him and he constantly had to defend himself. Violence surrounded him and he quickly realized that if he inflicted fear on people and was aggressive it was an advantage. Not surprisingly, this behavior led Jim down a dangerous path. One day at his grandparents house, Jim got into a fight with his father and his father hit him. The police were called and his dad had to face legal consequences for his actions. Afterwards, his grandparents put him out and life went from bad to worse. He ended up in the streets fighting and selling drugs. At the age of fifteen Jim was homeless. Luckily, he ended up moving with the dean of his junior high school but was unable to stay long because the dean could get in trouble. Sadly, leaving his house pushed him deeper into the streets. At the age of fourteen, Saint Germain got sucked into the system and was charged with possession of drugs. He was sentenced to a year in the juvenile justice system. That year turned out to be two and two turned out to be until he was eighteen because he was basically doing the same things in the system that he was doing in the streets. Prior to his release, Saint Germain came to the realization that he needed a clean and safe environment. He finished his time in juvenile detention and gained the foresight to understand that the structure of the detention center and his program participation was helping him. He had developed positive peer and adult relationships and began to acknowledge and respect the need for government authority within our society. Eventually, Saint Germain connected with the Canada’s, a family that Jim lived with, a family that cared and afforded him with a connection to all of the things he needed, wanted and appreciated. It wasn’t long before Saint Germain returned to his old Brooklyn neighborhood with a job and a plan. He started at Brooklyn Manhattan Community College, where he majored in political science. After graduation, he went back and started working in the same juvenile facility that he was a resident in. From there, he decided that youth advocacy was his life’s purpose and mission. He established his own non-profit business called Preparing Leaders of Tomorrow . Through his non-profit, he is able to work with and on behalf of youth from the same Brooklyn neighborhoods that he grew up in.

Lastly, students will analyze Alisa, a twenty three year youth specialist. For Alisa, it all started when she was thirteen and she started to display rebellious behaviors. She stole her father's car and was placed in a juvenile detention center. Surprisingly, two weeks after she was put on probation she stole another car and the consequence of her probation violation was placement in a treatment center and that was not very helpful. Her juvenile justice officer even had her participate in the "Scared Straight" program, which also was a failure. After the judge had given Alisa many chances, he/she placed her in Division of Youth Services custody. She no longer had a probation officer, she had a service coordinator. Alisa had to wait seven months in a juvenile detention center and then she was moved to a girls facility. She was placed in a group home and could not leave until she completed the program, it took her one year. According to Alisa, her placement in the group home was a blessing because all of the staff and the teachers there provided her with the support, guidance, respect and love that she needed. Alisa believes that it was the adults at the Sierra Osage facility that saved her life. They helped her realize that she was not an angry wild child that was always getting into trouble and fights just because she was mean. She was acting out because she came from a broken home and was hurting and lost and felt alone. Alisa allowed the responsible adults her life to support her in with developing social and coping skills that she would need to be a productive woman in society. They taught her what she needed to know in order to deal with the struggles that life cast your way.

All three of these life stories have commonalities that helped them overcome adversity. As my students complete their case study analysis they will identify what those commonalities are. For example, mentorship, accountability, and sheer determination.

This unit will also help students feel respected and listened to by their teachers and administrators. It will support and encourage the intimate connections required between teachers, students and other staff. I will be asking students to look at the current school discipline code of conduct and identify current behavior policies and the consequences of misbehaviors. Based on their research, I will ask students to brainstorm and develop alternative consequences to misconduct within the school. Ultimately, when schools are place of care and concern, respect and involvement, they behave and perform better.

In order for my students to understand the grim social and racial issues that infect them today and that could ultimately land them behind bars, they have to understand what has happened in the past. They must realize that others have come before them and have had the same experiences and have still been able to be successful in life. Within this seminar I have been able to familiarize myself with court cases involving juveniles, the Nixon and Reagan administrative era that launched the "War on Drugs", warrior police policy that dehumanized black communities and the school-to-prison pipeline phenomenon.

In this unit, students will be charged with the task of doing a case study analysis on individuals who look similar to them and who have had similar experiences as them, specifically they have had some affiliation with the juvenile justice system, criminal justice system or both. Case study is a task, which aims to teach the student how to analyze the causes and consequences of an event or activity by creating its role model. Such assignments show how complexities may influence various decisions and that is what makes case studies so important. For the purpose of what I am trying to accomplish, I will give the same topic to the entire class and it will become a sort of a discussion, after processing all available information. This will push my students to use all of their thinking skills and knowledge to analyze the situation correctly. The commonality of these three individuals, which I will allow my students to discover on their is that all three were able to overcome adversity. Not only will my students analyze these case studies, they will also engage in robust discussion to deepen their understanding of the history of the school-to-prison pipeline, how we have gotten here today and how to avoid the mousetraps that exist in our public school systems. Finally, my students will give a oral

presentation about how we as a local school community can assist in the dismantling of this devastating phenomenon and ultimately overcome adversity.

Sadly, the majority of my students are currently caught in the pipeline as we speak. Some have been recently released from a juvenile detention center and are in group homes or foster care. Others are currently on probation, some with ankle monitors and others under the supervision of probation officers. Lastly, are those who are involved in risky behaviors that have resulted in out-of-school suspensions, in-school suspensions and frequent removals from the classroom. Without access to education, the chances of them escaping from the school-to-prison pipeline and success once they return to the mainstream education system is between slim and none. The need for equal educational services for at-risk and adjudicated youth is particularly discerning. Taking into account that these youth show up to school and have a variety of unmet educational, mental health, medical and social needs. As a result of their absence from school for a myriad of reasons, most are functionally literate or illiterate and have experienced school failure and retention.

Students will also be looking at a variety of media sources, such as Allen Iverson on overcoming adversity, where he discusses the state of black youths in America and shares his thoughts on how to overcome your own shortcomings and one of Common's latest rap video's entitled "Letter to the Free" from his album *Black America Again*. These are both relevant examples that speak to the epidemic of racial disparities in the criminal justice system. During seminar, I learned of the Juvenile Justice and Prevention Act (JJDP), this act provides federal formula grants to each state, on the condition that the state submit and annually report on a plan to "reduce... the disproportionate number of juvenile members of minority groups, who come in contact with the juvenile justice system." (NYU Press 2010.)

I also want my students to think about ways they themselves can help with the dismantling of the school-to-prison pipeline. In order to help facilitate that work, I will ask my students to examine pieces of the article "The School-to-Prison Pipeline: Rhetoric and Reality" by Aaron Kupchik. I will provide my students with a graphic organizers that will help them distinguish the difference between Individual Risk Factors, School-level Risk Factors and Community-level Risk Factors so that they are aware of the dangers that exist at each level. Furthermore, this article gives strategies for reform in terms of student supports, school policies and community interventions which will in turn allow my students to come together either as a class or in their groups to brainstorm some ways that we as individuals and/or collectively can disassemble the pipeline.

Teaching Strategies

This unit will take place over three to four weeks. In the beginning, we will follow there tracks two tracks, reading and writing. However, because I have designed this unit to meet the unique developmental and social emotional needs of at-risk adolescents, I will implement an initial lesson around creating a safe space for my students learning. Also, this unit will satisfy the Common Core Standards at the 8th grade level.

Social Emotional Learning Strategy

The first step to creating a caring, inviting and positive learning environment is to create a safe space for my learners to be able to share, explore, challenge and grow. Creating a safe learning space for all students is critical to their participation. I will start by defining what a Safe Space is and how we can make sure that their group is a safe space for everyone. I will tell my students what the components of a Safe Space include and post them in a highly visible area inside the classroom for easy referencing, they are as follows:

The teacher and/or adults in the classroom is their partner

An established set of clear norms and a practice of respect and openness for all group members

Verbally state that the classroom is a Safe Space for ALL.

Emphasize the importance of confidentiality and what is discussed in the classroom, stays in the classroom

Ask permission before sharing group members stories or experiences.

I will divide the class into three groups of four. Before I begin, I will be sure that I have a *Tool Kit* ready if any issues should arise within the groups.

Issue: One or two people overshadow the conversation

Tool: Give everyone five objects (paper clips, erasers, marbles) at the start of each discussion. Explain that they have to use one of the objects every time they talk and they cannot talk anymore once their five objects have been used.

Issue: Students interrupt or talk over one another

Tool: Use a talking piece and pass it around the group and only the person holding the object can speak.

Issue: No one in the group is sharing

Tool: Do a “think, pair, share” by getting the group into pairs to share about a topic or discussion question and then one person in the pair can share out to the group.

Tool: As the facilitator, move around the group asking each person to comment on the question or conversation.

Once students are settled in their groups I will introduce an icebreaker activity such as the *Riverboat Story*, this will get my students actively engaged in a healthy discussion amongst the group members. Not only will this story serve as an icebreaker activity, it will also act as a pre-viewing activity before they watch the videos later on in the lesson. In addition to creating that space for learning, students will also be activating their background knowledge and developing a schema for the subject area that we are going to be studying.

Cooperative Learning Strategies*

Think-Pair-Share, is a method that allows students to engage in individual and small-group thinking before they are asked to answer questions in front of the whole class. There are four steps to this method. The first step, groups of four students listen to a question posed by the teacher. Secondly, individual students are given time to think and then write their responses. Thirdly, pairs of students read and discuss their responses. Finally, a few students are called on by the teacher to share their thoughts and ideas with the whole class.

Uncommon Commonalities, with this strategy, I will group students into teams of four and have them come up with a team name. I will provide each team member a piece of paper and have them fold it the long way in fours and label each section, 1, 2, 3, and 4 at the top. Next, students will write a question on the front board, such as “How many siblings do you have?” The teams’ goal is to discuss the question with their group and figure out what they all have in common. If all four team members have one brother, then they will write that in column four, if all three of them have one brother then they will write that in column three and so on. The

activity continues with each new question that is put on the board

Forced Debate, This strategy requires students to use their communication skills to work within a group. This is how it works, I will write a proposition on the front board, such as “Should there be a vending machine in the school cafeteria?” then the students who agree move to one side of the classroom and the students who disagree move to other side. Once students are on one side of the classroom, that is now their group. The teacher then forces them to debate the opposing side that they have chosen. This strategy really utilizes students’ critical thinking skills and forces them to really think about the question as a whole in order to argue for the opposing side rather than what they really feel about the question.

Writing Strategies*

Journaling, personal journaling will take place regularly and frequently throughout the unit. Students will be given the opportunity free write and some instances, students will be given purposeful prompts. This is an integral part of the unit and extremely important given the nature of the unit and my students own personal experiences because journaling has emotional benefits. Journaling helps teachers strengthen the relationship they have with their students and increase student teacher interactions. I will read each entry (or opt to read one entry per week) and write a short response. In this instance, journaling serves as an ongoing dialogue and it instantly builds trust and confidentiality. Students know what they write will remain between themselves and the teacher. In the past, I have noticed and have often mention how shocked I am with some of the information my students have shared with me. Journaling is very helpful for those students who are shy or lack confidence in their writing and are not interested in sharing with class. Thus, journaling serves as an emotional and creative outlet in general.

Graphic Organizers, I will provide my students with graphic organizers to help them structure their writing for their oral presentations. Supplying them with this learning tool will make it easier for students to classify their ideas and identify areas of focus within a board topic. The use of graphic organizers will also help my students make connections and structure their thinking. In addition to helping students organize their thinking and writing process, graphic organizers can serve as a valuable teaching tool. I wanted to ensure that I included strategies in this curriculum that would also support the teacher in overall classroom management. The use of multiple graphic organizers through the unit will increase the number of student/teacher interactions and give the teacher a chance to display a student’s knowledge about a topic or section of a text showing areas of improvement. This will boost student self-confidence and foster their motivations to learn. Some examples of the graphic organizers that I will be using are as follows:

K-W-L chart

Venn Diagram

Viewing Guides

Outlines

Viewing Strategies, Full length videos and video clips can be very useful during instruction. However, it is critical to plan ahead of time in order to ensure that our students will learn from watching it. I will show the videos that I referenced in my curriculum unit and I will take students through three stages, pre-viewing, viewing and post view. In the first stage of pre-viewing, I will provide students with questions and/or prompts that I think is important in the documentaries. I will write the questions/prompts on the board, hand out

worksheets with the questions/prompts on it and I will post the questions/prompts online ahead time for them to submit electronically. I will give my students access to the content and the option to respond in multiple ways and will encourage them to respond in whichever way they feel comfortable. The second stage is the viewing stage, we will watch the videos as a class and I will pause the video as needed to point out events that I think will be useful for my students as they begin preparing their oral presentations. I will be modeling the engagement with the video that I expect my students to demonstrate while they are viewing the film. Modeling the student behavior is key. The final stage, post view, I will take some time to debrief as a class or in small groups about student responses to the questions/prompts that I posed. I will check for understanding of key terms and in general will make sure that they have achieved the learning outcomes that I set for watching the video.

Integrate Vocabulary, one of the things that I have learned about teaching vocabulary is that it's not enough to talk about a word once. It needs to be seen, heard, and used several times before it is mastered. Writing is the perfect place to incorporate some vocabulary instruction. I will select two or three words that might be useful to students for the topic they are writing about. I will teach these words, give example sentences, and share sentences where students were able to work them in. You can either teach the words before students write their rough draft or teach them before students revise. In the past, I have found it helpful for my students to keep a record of these words in a notebook. Directly, after my students watch the documentary "Innocent Until Proven Guilty" we will discuss vocabulary. As my students are watching videos, I will require them to complete a viewing guide. The viewing guide will task them with writing down any words that they are unfamiliar with and/or any misconceptions they might have. I will pause the video when I feel it is necessary and/or beneficial for my students understanding and will engage in a robust discussion and define unfamiliar terms after the viewing.

Peer Conferencing, many students find working with a partner to be very motivating. However, it has been my experience that it is important to thoroughly structure peer writing conferencing because it can rear off course very quickly. In this case, I will set a specific goal such as helping each other check for capital letters at the beginning of every sentence, rereading to make sure each sentence makes sense, or looking for words that could be swapped out for something more interesting. A different way to structure peer conferencing is to use the "Love and a Wish" system. Students read each other's writing. Then they share one thing they loved about it and one thing they wished. For example, maybe they loved how their partner described their new bike but they wished there was more about the tricks that they could do when riding it.

Use a Rubric, research shows that when students have criteria against which to judge their writing and other writing samples, they begin to internalize that criteria and use it when they write new pieces or delivery oral presentations. I think I can use this same concept for when they are developing their oral presentations. As a matter of fact, for the purpose of my unit, I will be using a oral presentation rubric which focuses on delivery, content/organization, enthusiasm/audience awareness and comments for feedback.

Reading Strategies*

My students will watch a variety of media sources, including Allen Iverson's documentary on overcoming adversity and "Innocent Until Proven Guilty" another documentary about the crusade against the criminalization young african american youths caught up in the pipeline. Students will also be watching a rap video titled "Letter to the Free" by Common.

Preview, Preview is a strategy to activate students' prior knowledge, to facilitate their predictions about what they will read, and to generate interest. Preview consists of two activities: (a) brainstorming and (b) making

predictions.

I will introduce previewing to students by asking them to think about the previews they have seen at the movies. Next, I will ask students to tell what they learn from previews by asking questions such as, “do you learn who is going to be in the movie?” or “do you learn in what historical period the movie will take place?” Next, I will provide my students with the article “The School-to-Prison Pipeline” and I will ask them to skim information such as headings, pictures, and words that are bolded or underlined to determine (a) what they know about the topic and (b) what they think they will learn by reading the text.

Click and Clunk, Click and clunk is a strategy that teaches students to monitor their understanding during reading, and to use fix-up strategies when they realize their failure to understand what they have just read. I describe the click as something that “you really get. You know it just “clicks.” After students understand the “click”, then I explain the clunk: “A clunk is like when you run into a brick wall. You just really don’t understand a word the author is using. That’s a “clunk.” Then, I read a short piece aloud and ask students to listen carefully for clunks. I ask my students to write down their clunks and then I teach the fix-up strategies to figure out the clunks. I usually post “clunk cards” somewhere in the classroom so that students can refer to them as needed.

Get the gist, Get the gist is a strategy to help students identify main ideas during reading. One way to identify the main idea is to answer the following questions: (a) “who or what is it about?” and (b) “what is most important about the who or what?” In addition, I teach my students to limit their response to ten words or less, so that their gist conveys the most important idea(s), but not unnecessary details.

Get the gist can be taught by focusing on one paragraph at a time. While students read the paragraph, I ask them to identify the most important person, place, or thing. Then I ask students to tell what is most important about the person, place, or thing. Finally, I teach my students to put it all together in a sentence containing ten words or less.

Wrap up, Wrap up is a strategy that teaches students to generate questions and to review important ideas in the text they have read. Wrap up consists of two activities: (a) generating questions, and (b) reviewing.

In the beginning I teach students to wrap it up by telling students to pretend they are teachers and to think of questions they would ask on a test. I usually suggest the following question starters: who, what, when, where, why, and how. I also encourage students to generate some questions that require an answer involving higher-order thinking skills, rather than literal recall. Lastly, I will ask students to write down the most important ideas from the class reading assignment.

The final culminating project will involve my students advocating for themselves and using their voice to evoke change within their school, Washington Metropolitan Opportunity Academy. For this final piece I will introduce my students to an oral presentation rubric that gives them clear guidelines of the expectations that I will be looking for such as, delivery, content/organization, enthusiasm/audience awareness and comments. As students are preparing their presentation, I will allot time for peer review by allowing their classmates to critique their presentations using the rubric for feedback before presenting to the grade level administration.

Oral Presentation Rubric

	4—Excellent	3—Good	2—Fair	1—Needs Improvement
Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds attention of entire audience with the use of direct eye contact, seldom looking at notes • Speaks with fluctuation in volume and inflection to maintain audience interest and emphasize key points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent use of direct eye contact with audience, but still returns to notes • Speaks with satisfactory variation of volume and inflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays minimal eye contact with audience, while reading mostly from the notes • Speaks in uneven volume with little or no inflection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds no eye contact with audience, as entire report is read from notes • Speaks in low volume and/ or monotonous tone, which causes audience to disengage
Content/ Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates full knowledge by answering all class questions with explanations and elaboration • Provides clear purpose and subject; pertinent examples, facts, and/or statistics; supports conclusions/ideas with evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is at ease with expected answers to all questions, without elaboration • Has somewhat clear purpose and subject; some examples, facts, and/or statistics that support the subject; includes some data or evidence that supports conclusions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is uncomfortable with information and is able to answer only rudimentary questions • Attempts to define purpose and subject; provides weak examples, facts, and/ or statistics, which do not adequately support the subject; includes very thin data or evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not have grasp of information and cannot answer questions about subject • Does not clearly define subject and purpose; provides weak or no support of subject; gives insufficient support for ideas or conclusions
Enthusiasm/ Audience Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates strong enthusiasm about topic during entire presentation • Significantly increases audience understanding and knowledge of topic; convinces an audience to recognize the validity and importance of the subject 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows some enthusiastic feelings about topic • Raises audience understanding and awareness of most points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows little or mixed feelings about the topic being presented • Raises audience understanding and knowledge of some points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows no interest in topic presented • Fails to increase audience understanding of knowledge of topic
Comments				

By the end of this, Students will cite textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, analyze how particular incidents in a story propel an action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke decisions, determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, analyze the impact of specific word choices or meaning and tone including analogies, write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence, write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts and information through the selection, organization and analysis of relevant content and engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on 8th grade topics, texts and issues, building on others ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Analyze the purpose of information presented n diverse media and formats and evaluate motives (social, commercial,political) behind its presentation. (Any ideas here folks??)

Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence,

sound valid reasoning and well chosen details, use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume and clear pronunciation and integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentation to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence and add interest.

Finally, it is my most sincere hope that my students will be inspired by this unit and recognize that even as an adolescent caught up in the pipeline that they have voice and that they can use their voice in combination with action to affect change in their communities.

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