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 The University of Memphis  
 California 2021 Early Math Symposium (Virtual)  
 Friday, June 25, 2021  
 1:55 p.m. – 2:40 p.m.



**Who Are Our Community Helpers? Black Boys and Policing**

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**The Impetus for the Community Helpers Curriculum...**

Standard K.15 states, "Describe roles of authority figures in the home, school, and community including caregivers, teachers, school principal, police officers, and fire/rescue workers" (TN Social Studies, 2017, p. 24).

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**What are the expected Enduring Understandings?**

- To expose young children to how they can be active, responsible, and conscientious members of their community.
- Many children develop aspirations to follow in the steps of (un)sung heroes like sanitation workers and bus drivers or other professionals like police officers and judges.

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Herein lies the Contradiction...

- Black children, boys in particular, personal experience directly and indirectly contradicts the TN Social Studies Government and Civic standard as it is understood and carried out by well-meaning teachers that community helpers are *friends* who are there to *protect and serve*. (Wright, 2021)
- Children may have firsthand experience of a family member murdered by police, or they may have witnessed these traumatic occurrences in media coverage that (re)traumatizes Black bodies and communities. (Wright, 2021)

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Does Trauma exist in the P-12 Curriculum?

- whiteness and white ideologies continue to pervade the ways schools plan curriculum, deliver instruction, and manage (or mismanage) the multicultural and multi-ethnic classroom climate (Johnson, 2019).
- When educators lack the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to infuse the curriculum with readings, activities, and assignments that nuance, position and challenge students of color, Black boys in particular in positive and affirming ways, they (wittingly and perhaps unwittingly), can (re)traumatize these children in disorienting and damaging ways. (Wright, 2021)

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Community Helpers Curriculum vs. Reality

- Children are taught that police offers help prevent crimes and make sure people in the community follow the rules and laws to ensure they are safe.
- Is this true for all Black communities, and Black boys in particular?
- Black people are 2.5 times more likely to be arrested than Whites (Henning & Davis, 2017), and decades of data show that racial disparity begins for Black males when they are boys of school age.

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**The Reality for Black Boys in schools and society...**

- The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights reports that while Black children make up only 19% of preschool enrollment, they represent 47% of preschool children receiving one or more out-of-school suspensions. In contrast, White children represent 41% of preschool enrollment but only 28% of suspensions (Wright, 2019).
- Black boys are also seen in schools and by society as more culpable for their actions and less innocent than their peers of other races (Wright, 2018; Wright, 2019).
- Black boys are viewed as "bad boys" and "troublemakers," suspected and dehumanized first before schools and society see their humanity.

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**Where do we go from here?**

Schools can play "a critical role in educating students about citizenship and societal values, which have long perpetuated the cycle of racial injustice" (AACTE, 2021, p. 1), preparing early childhood educators in and for the future in light of "the events of this last year from a historical perspective" (AACTE, 2021, p. 1) can result in the creation of caring and equitable classroom communities.

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**Resisting the Tendency to follow the Better Angels of our Existence...**

- How can early childhood educators teach about community helpers in honest, sensitive, and respectful ways without doing more harm than good?
- How can educators use the community helpers unit and others to cultivate the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of Black boys in the face of systemic and structural inequalities?

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**Reimagining the Community Helpers Curriculum...**

- If the “Community Helpers” curriculum unit – and others – are to be culturally responsive, relevant, sustaining, and responsible, the controversy surrounding policing in communities of color cannot be ignored in favor of standards that promote “Government and Civic” engagement that is uncritical and devoid of race, diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (RDEIJ). (Wright, 2021)

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**Reflection...**

- Learn about the larger structural challenges Black boys face, including the systemic racism that affects family income and wealth, access to resources, representations of African Americans in media, and the likelihood of involvement in the criminal justice system (which is often summed up as the school-to-prison pipeline).
- Ask yourself, “What obstacles do Black boys face that I haven’t acknowledged? How do Black boys reveal their gifts, talents, creativity, resilience, resourcefulness, and brilliance in overcoming these challenges? (Wright, 2019)

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**THANK YOU!**

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