

BREAKING FREE FROM THE SCRIPT

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ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL: A SCRIPT SO UBIQUITOUS, IT WAS INVISIBLE

I remember standing in a single-file line as a first-grader. After getting dropped off at school, I stood in line in the parking lot, waiting to enter the building; in cold weather, we lined up in the gym. We lined up to walk outside to recess and after that, to walk to lunch, and again to return to the classroom. We lined up to walk to music class once a week, to go to the bathroom, to leave for the day. When we weren't standing in line, we sat in desks arranged in rows (assigned seating, of course), and when sitting on the floor, we were instructed to sit crisscross applesauce. I attended one of the dozens of Catholic schools on the west side of Cincinnati; all of us competed against each other in soccer or basketball, representing schools that began with "Saint" or "Our Lady." And, every Monday afternoon, we got in line to go to "liturgical music" (or "churchical music" as that was what I thought it was called). We walked to the church next to our school, sat in the pews, and practiced the music that would be sung at Mass later in the week.

In science class, we learned the three states of matter by calling them out repetitively after the teacher asked us to name them. I dutifully called out, "solid, liquid, gas," over and over until the teacher deemed our knowledge sufficient. In language arts, I remember breezing through the SRA bin in the back of the classroom. I couldn't wait to finish, but I also liked completing them and seeing myself move from red to orange and eventually to the coveted purple section. I actually enjoyed these scripted, static activities. I was good at them, especially the language arts activities, and they didn't give me the feeling of dread that artistic expression induced. In the fourth grade, we were to design a mobile for our book report project, which drove me to near panic. From this project, I learned to procrastinate and ended up staying up past midnight drawing stick figures depicting characters and scenes since I postponed starting the project until right after dinner the night before it was due. Worksheets and SRAs could be finished quickly, and I didn't have to draw anything.

One rare week, in the first grade, my parents were out of town. My mom randomly entered her name in a contest at the local Thriftway grocery store for a trip for two to the Bahamas, and she won. I never thought that anyone actually ever won those contests, yet here we were staying with my grandparents for a week, the only week I remember my parents taking a trip alone together in the 17 years that I lived at home with them. My grandparents were Italian immigrants, and with that came the most delicious food you can imagine but also some severely strict rules. The surfaces of their home were filled with my grandma's replicas of Jesus, Mary, and the Saints, which we weren't allowed to touch, and my grandpa worked second shift, and he habitually laid on his side on the floor of the living room watching TV, half sleeping, half watching *Gunsmoke* before he left for his shift at the Ford plant in Sharonville. We could not disturb him, nor could we go outside.

When my grandma wasn't cooking or cleaning, we would play hangman or tic tac toe. After we exhausted our game time, I turned to my books and homework. I had a thick language arts workbook and started the pages assigned to us for the weekend, then I kept going. At school the following Monday, Mrs. Uhlner began her lesson, and I continued to complete the workbook

pages. I kept the book on my lap and slyly flipped back and forth from the page we were on as a class to the page I was completing.

“Miss Minniti. What page are you on in the workbook?” I snapped to attention. Mrs. Uhlner had halted her lesson, and all eyes were staring at me.

“Um, I was working ahead.” I could feel my face flush, the shame enveloping me. I did not like to be called out. I was an obedient child. I didn’t cause trouble, I raised my hand and participated in class, I did my homework, and I didn’t talk when we weren’t supposed to talk. I lined up when we were supposed to line up. And, here I was, the center of attention in language arts class, working on the wrong page.

“What *page* are you on?” She continued, walking over and picking up my book and holding it in the air. The pink eraser marking my page dropped to the floor, bouncing on its corner once or twice before it settled, evidence of my misbehavior.

“Uh, page 184,” I stammered.

“We are not on that page. We are on page 79. You are not able to complete the lesson on page 184 because you haven’t learned it yet. We do not work ahead. We work together. Give me your pencil and eraser. And, do not work any further ahead than you already have. Do you understand me?” I had never been scolded like this before.

She continued, “Is everyone else on page 79?”

The entire class nodded and some snickered. I could feel them thinking, “How could she be so stupid to be working on page 184? Why would she do that?”

I felt mortified and ashamed. I remember slumping in my seat after this, my mind drifting as Mrs. Uhlner continued her lesson. I felt bored and detached. At that moment, I learned that it was more important to follow the rules than to challenge myself. I learned not to call attention to myself and to keep my head down and do the work assigned to me. I put my head down and pretended to do the work.

After this incident, I strived not to call attention to myself, yet the drive to push back remained under the surface. Several years later, in the seventh grade, I attended a funeral. It was a Catholic funeral, like most of the funerals I attended (I was the great-grandchild of German and Italian immigrants who lived on the west side of Cincinnati; Catholicism was ubiquitous). This funeral took place in a different part of town, at a small parish, and what struck me about this funeral in particular was that girls were the altar servers. I had never seen a girl in the role of an altar server so I asked my mom why girls weren’t servers at my westside parish. She shared that because there weren’t enough boys who volunteered, girls were allowed to serve.

“That is ridiculous! Girls can only serve if there aren’t enough boys to do it?!” I exclaimed.

“You’re right; that is kind of silly, isn’t it? Why don’t you write a petition to the archbishop?” she responded.

And thus began my activism, albeit accidentally, fueled by my incredulity about the gender inequity that had just become apparent to me. I recruited my best friend, and we drafted a petition to the Archbishop, outlining the reasons why the Church should update its rules to allow youth of both genders to participate in Mass as altar servers. We circulated our petition around the 7th grade classrooms, rewriting it and recirculating it after Timmy Peters ripped it up, walked up to the garbage can in the front of the room, and threw it away. We mailed it off to the archdiocese and waited for a reply. Something shifted in me. I had begun to stray from the scripted curriculum of the Catholic church, which had been the backdrop of my life: hierarchical and bureaucratic, rigid and prescriptive, and almost entirely outwardly invisible to me until this moment.

THE DAMAGE DONE: MISSED OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING AND GROWTH

My Catholic education was not unlike the scripted curriculum in “no-excuses” schools, part of the character education movement that proliferated in the 1980s and 1990s and that continue apace today (Golann, 2021; Love, 2018). We had our own prescribed responses, our scripted movements: kneel after this recitation, stand after that, perform the sign of the cross here, shake hands there, but be careful not to shake too many people’s hands as that can be disruptive. The response to my petition was lackluster. The Archbishop didn’t budge in his decision. My research prior to writing the petition showed that individual dioceses could, in fact, decide to allow girls to be altar servers so long as “such an authorization may not, in any way, exclude men, or, in particular, boys from the service at the altar” (John Paul II, 1994, as cited in Nash, n.d., para. 13) In our diocese, we had enough boys to do the job; thus, girls were not needed. The bottom of the letter included a cursory thank you for taking the time to write and an invitation to remain faithful to the Church.

Though frustrated, I had gained a glimpse of the “*tools of interaction*, the attitudes, skills, and styles that allow certain groups to effectively navigate complex institutions and shifting expectations” (Golann, 2021, p. 3, emphasis in original). Ironically, these scripted curricula, pervasive in schools a decade after my petition-writing experience, failed to do what they purported to do—prepare students for life. Instead, they chased test scores set in motion by the *No Child Left Behind Act* in 2001 and left out the crucial experience of taking risks that can ultimately lead to successfully navigating complexity and context.

Though in a scripted reality, I was given an opportunity to understand the hidden curriculum, the cultural capital, that would serve me well in my future. In Golann’s study of the SLANT curriculum in a “No-Excuses” charter school, student (mis)behavior is strictly categorized. Students who do not follow directions, including continuing to write after the teacher has instructed students to put their pencils down, are seen as “incompetent” or “opportunistic.” Students learn to blindly follow instructions and are given “little latitude to question authority, bend rules to their advantage, or act spontaneously during the day” (Golann, 2021, p. 6). How can students learn these nuanced, crucial skills without practice and what better place to practice than in schools, when the stakes should be low?

Was I, too, deemed “opportunistic” or “incompetent” through my persistent questioning? I continued to bump up against the script. My 7th grade experience stuck with me. I gained a glimpse into a different way of being and began to question why things were the way they were. Three years after I mailed the petition to the Archbishop, I was invited to serve as a student representative on a “mission effectiveness” committee at my all-girls’ Catholic high school. This mission statement included verbiage about preparing students to be women of service to others. I felt unsettled about this statement since nothing in our school outwardly provided opportunities for us to engage in service to the community. The all-boys’ high school next door offered a community service class where students volunteered in local elementary schools, nursing homes, or with Habitat for Humanity during the last bell of the day. They each had a service site then came together to engage in reflection. If the mission of my high school was to prepare young women to be of service to others, why didn’t we have such a class? I surfaced this issue, and Sister Barbara, my principal, told me that there wasn’t enough interest in community service to merit a class.

“Why don’t you start a club?” Sister Brenda said.

Starting a club in the 1990s was a much more rudimentary undertaking than it is today. There were no official or standard administrative processes. I made a request to the class co-

presidents to make an announcement over the P.A. system and tacked a piece of looseleaf paper on the oversized “Club Bulletin Board” hanging outside the school lunchroom. I had written “Service Club Sign-Up Sheet” at the top and drawn two columns underneath asking for students to list their names and phone numbers (an * by their name meant they could drive to the site). I proceeded to organize visits to the local soup kitchen, ReSTOC, and Imago Earth Center. Students would meet in the school parking lot, and we would spend a few hours together on Saturday mornings or after school. Though the early service activities only included one or two other students (sometimes just my high school boyfriend and me), over 200 students had joined the “Service Club” by the end of the school year. When I graduated high school, my school still didn’t offer a class, but one currently exists (and an administrator manages all of the logistics now that schools have more defined risk management protocol).

My questions continued. In high school, I sat in the pew on Sunday while the priest spent his homily outlining the “sin of homosexuality.” He preached “love the sinner, but hate the sin.” I felt my temperature rise and my breath shorten. What, exactly, is this priest pontificating about? Loving another person? My uncle had just gotten married to his long-term partner. The unconditional love between them was palpable; it was the most beautiful and powerful wedding I had ever attended. I witnessed my uncle and his husband declare their love to each other publicly, amid constant scrutiny, discrimination, and harassment and even in the face of rejection by my uncle’s own parents who chose not to attend. I failed to understand this “sin of homosexuality” that the priest chastised. I had seen nothing but love and respect. I walked out of the church that day and sat outside until Mass was over.

“I can’t stay,” I admitted to myself.

FREE AS A BIRD: LEAVING THE SCRIPT BEHIND

In looking back on my intertwined school and church experiences, the instances when I pushed up against the script resulted in the most learning and growth. I continually felt a dissonance between what was being preached and what I experienced, including the ironic hymns proclaiming “happiness and joy” in a monotone, flat chorus, the furthest thing from demonstrating happiness and joy. At my 10-year high school reunion, I was surprised by how many people asked where I lived and whether or not my husband graduated from the all-boys’ Catholic school next door to ours. I moved away to go to college when I was 17, but I had only traveled 20 minutes. My husband didn’t attend that school, but he was from a Cincinnati neighborhood in what would best be described as north or central. I didn’t realize that I had left the script until I looked around at my former classmates most of whom were married to their high school sweethearts, had starter houses purchased in their childhood neighborhoods, and were poised to send their children to their neighborhood schools and churches.

What had pulled me out of the script? When I pushed up against it, I was often told no, and my response to no quickly became “Why not?” or “I’ll show you.” I pushed against the script, and while it was minimally tolerated, it wasn’t invited or encouraged. How might my experience have been different if Mrs. Uhlner had responded to my zeal for grammar with opportunities to extend my learning or adapted the curriculum in such a way that felt relevant (Valdez, 2020). Truth be told, I didn’t leave the church right after I walked out. I continued to yearn for authentic experiences of learning and growth, something bigger, perhaps a “feeling connected to something larger than the self” that felt missing from my religious, educational upbringing, but I kept running

into dead ends (Keltner, 2023, p. 15). How do we untangle ourselves from the script that has been the backdrop of our life?

Teachers in schools with scripted curricula struggle with this tension of adopting or adapting, staying or leaving. Some teachers embrace the newly imposed scripted curriculum for the simplicity it provides and the “equal access to rigorous curriculum” for all students (Timberlake et al., 2017, p. 49). Many teachers using scripted curricula report low morale, feelings of powerlessness, resentment, anger, frustration, guilt, pain, and for many teachers, it pushes them out of the classroom entirely. As one teacher proclaimed, it “squelch[ed] [her] passion” (Powell et al., 2017, p. 107).

Haroon Moghul writes of this reality in his memoir, *How to Be a Muslim: An American Story*. Moghul spends his life following the script of a Pakistani, Muslim American, a child of immigrant parents. He gets good grades, attends mosque, applies to Ivy league and highly ranked schools, and eventually goes to law school as his brother did. Even after examining his path through deep analysis of Islamic philosophy, he determined that “knowing you need to do something is still not doing that thing” (Moghul, 2017, p. 90). Moghul calls us to question *how* we may break free from the script after we know it’s what we need to do.

EVERYBODY WANTS TO RULE THE WORLD: POWER AND CONTROL

More than a decade after coming to terms with the Catholic script that shaped my upbringing, it was time for my husband and me to decide where to send our children to school. Even with our limited exposure to the scripted curricula ensconced in public schools, we knew we didn’t want that experience for our children. We knew the doctrine and rules of the Catholic school system were not an option, and my husband’s experience attending public school was no better. As a child in the 1980s with undiagnosed ADHD, he spent the majority of his childhood being sent into the hallway or having the sides of a cardboard box erected on his desk to keep him from getting distracted. We wanted an environment where our children would have meaningful experiences, and we certainly did not want an environment where teachers “taught to the test.”

We agonized most deeply about where to send our son to school. He spent the first three years of his life home with my husband, a stay-at-home dad. When we did send him to pre-school in the fall of 2019, he cried every morning as I dropped him off in carline, and at the end of the week when they sent home the work that he produced for the week, his backpack was full of sketches of giant sad faces with the word “DADEE DADEE” and large frown faces etched on them. Everyone knows what happened next. School shut down in March of 2020. In 2021, schools reopened with students in person and wearing masks every other day with remote school happening on the alternate days. We opted out of school from March 2020 through August 2022.

Post-COVID, we asked ourselves what kind of environment would provide meaningful learning. What would need to be in place for our children, for all children, to actually learn? We ultimately chose Montessori education and, more specifically, a newly created nature-Montessori school in our own neighborhood. We believed this school embodied our values. It was nonhierarchical, committed to equity and community, and embedded time in nature into the curriculum. We asked ourselves what could possibly be more important than educating our children in a community environment with a focus on stewardship and care for the environment—our children’s future? However, by the school’s second year, it had doubled in size, and a new classroom opened. Our son was placed in the “lower elementary” classroom, led by two newly

hired teachers. We had an open mind but started to get concerned when he began to ruminate over whether or not this teacher would yell at him the next day. He came home reporting that he and his friends were sent to the hallway or kept in from recess (this was a nature school). Our son was shutting down, unable to learn. One afternoon, he came home with a severe rash on his hands. He is allergic to latex, and it mirrored the rash he got when we learned of his allergy (after he put on a latex Band-Aid). We asked our son what happened, and he shared that he was instructed to put on a pair of latex gloves. He said that he told the teachers that he was allergic to latex but was told to put them on anyway. We assumed there was a miscommunication, so the next day, I called the school to let them know that he was allergic to latex (Miss Amelia was new, after all) and was interrupted mid-sentence.

“He didn’t wear any gloves yesterday,” she stated.

“Um, he said that he did and has a rash that he has gotten before. I’m not mad, I just... “

“I told you he didn’t wear any gloves.”

I was flabbergasted. My husband and I began to talk to other parents, and we noticed a pattern. The high energy seven and eight-year-old boys were constantly “in trouble.”

While chaperoning a field trip, I witnessed a boy being told to sit down and stay still numerous times after the children were invited to get in line for a snack. He was as confused as I was. I wish I could tell you that the issues resolved themselves or that the teacher’s behavior changed after a heartfelt conversation and realization that she was treating the boys differently from the girls. Ultimately, the defensiveness persisted, and her need to control (versus be in control) overshadowed any possibility of understanding.

Though we had allegedly broken free from the script, our experience felt eerily familiar. Reliving our son’s issues brought me back to a previous toxic work environment I experienced. My former boss, a Vice President, consistently scheduled meetings without consulting our shared calendars stating, “You can cancel any meetings you have.” He often asked if we were “competitive or collaborative” and forced us to choose one over the other, refusing to entertain the possibility that one might be both or that collaboration could, in fact, yield positive results. Basic decisions had to be approved by him, and he required that his direct reports copy him on any emails to the Dean or above, including for standard operating procedures. I began to re-write my emails multiple times, second guessing myself. My confidence shattered, and my experience at work started to bleed into my home life. On the weekends, I either lashed out in anger or laid in bed for half the day, too exhausted to get up. And, I was completely unaware of my own behavior. I had no space for learning or growth; I was in closed, protective mode.

In hindsight, in these examples, the need for control (or protection?) created an environment where learning and flourishing were impossible. Though rather extreme, the script in schools, in workplaces—and even children’s sports teams—is to control, to expect the students, participants, or employees to blindly follow the teacher or leader. Power and control are the real force behind scripted curricula. But, who is actually in control? Teachers are beholden to administrators who serve the districts who, in some cases, end up serving the testing companies. And the testing companies hold a disproportionate amount of power due to their promise of meeting coveted test scores and needed funding (Powell et al., 2017). It’s striking how far removed the locus of control sits from actual students.

Twenty years after I told myself I needed to leave the church, I found myself stuck in a similar reality. I stayed in that job—a scripted, controlled environment—for six years. “That’s a really long time to stay in a toxic situation,” a colleague told me. I joked with friends that I would list “ability to withstand dysfunction for indefinite periods of time” on my resume. Yet, under the



surface, there was a sense of comfort in my situation. Even though I didn't like it, I knew what to expect. I knew how to handle it. I was starting to succumb to this system. And, when creative, engaged, non-scripted teachers either stop pushing back or leave because of a district adopted curriculum, who remains? Is this the point of the scripted curriculum or an unintended consequence?

HERE COMES THE SUN: THE UNTANGLING

What is the extent to which scripted curriculum is robbing our children—and our teachers? Students experiencing scripted curricula are denied the opportunity to have a voice in society (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020), do not have opportunities to practice flexibility and adaptability needed for interacting with authority figures (Golann, 2021), and participate in a learning environment that is devoid of meaning (Powell et al., 2017). Teachers are robbed of their own authority and agency as their effectiveness is judged by whether or not they stuck to the script versus whether or not they reached their students (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020; Powell et al., 2017). The potential consequences are grave.

Fitz and Nikolaidis (2020) argue the undemocratic nature of scripted curriculum due to its inability to prepare students authentically for civic life. This is especially problematic since those who have been historically marginalized are most likely to experience scripted curricula (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020; Timberlake et al., 2017). College essays and job interviews ask for examples of “taking initiative.” But when students are instructed through scripted curricula, they lose these opportunities. Taking initiative requires real learning, and real learning is never scripted. Authentic learning includes meaningful content and autonomy, both for the students and teachers. Scripted curriculum results in the opposite: content void of context and control over what teachers can teach and even how they teach it.

How then might teachers free themselves from the scripted curricula that they so often find themselves butting up against? Scripted curricula have become so pervasive in our schools—and are reinforced by the longstanding scripts of religion, military, and now authoritarian governments—that breaking free from them will not be easy. Without self-reflection and an analysis of our contexts and beliefs, teachers can convince themselves that the scripted curriculum creates equality since all students are being taught the same way (Timberlake et al., 2017). Engaging in *currere* can help. The purpose of *currere* is to pull oneself out of unquestioned assumptions, to make meaning out of the experiences that have remained with us, and to pull us out of our linear timeline. . A reckoning of ourselves and a rejection of unconsciously living for “unconsciousness perpetuates itself” (Pinar, 1994, p. 22).

While I gained a crucial glimpse of independent thinking and autonomy in spite of my scripted Catholic educational setting, I often ask myself, what would it look like if opportunities for students to practice using these tools of interaction were consciously integrated into the curriculum? What is needed to create a learning environment that prepares students to think critically and engage meaningfully in society? Real learning is not scripted. In second language learning, “meaningful output” is considered the most influential factor in actually learning a language. Real learning is meaningful, authentic, and requires agency of both student and teacher. What is the risk of allowing students to lead the learning? What might occur if we refuse to cling fast to our comfortable structures and systems?

Brian Schultz's experience in a 5th grade classroom at Carr Academy in a Chicago housing project provides a compelling counternarrative to scripted curricula. Through the Project Citizen curriculum, he invites his students to identify a problem facing their community. After collectively brainstorming 89 different problems, one student proclaimed, "our school is a dump," thus resulting in a year-long project where advocating for their new school building became the curriculum. Students experienced civics through researching government processes for educational-decision making, they practiced literacy through writing letters about their experiences to local leaders, conducted interviews with local leaders, and learned statistics through survey production and distribution. The learning was relevant and provided the experiences needed to gain cultural capital (Golann, 2021; Schultz, 2018).

Though not quite as all-encompassing, Valdez (2020) utilized critical analysis to introduce non-dominant narratives into her classroom, making the content more meaningful for her students, while still adhering to the imposed Common Core standards. Students engaged in inquiry projects related to relevant content. "They saw themselves reflected in the topics they researched" (Valdez, 2020, p. 591). Students ultimately shared their learning through a poster presentation celebration, which providing meaningful learning around critical content (Valdez, 2020). Her adaptive approach created a work-around of sorts and an avenue for students to find meaning within the script.

And, yet, reimagined approaches are not without critique. High ranking school and government officials refused to believe that Schultz's students were capable of this type of inquiry and self-advocacy (Schultz, 2018). Moreover, it's a lot easier to stay within a system—which, even while toxic, provides some comfort in familiarity—or to point out the flaws in a current system without providing an alternative. Even in environments where the script is less prevalent, and especially in those where it is adopted, ruthless self-examination and self-interrogation is critical. While in college, a wise mentor once told me, "we don't learn from our experiences; we learn from reflecting on our experiences." Deep reflection has been the focus on this immersion into scripted curricula, and this sentiment about reflecting on our experiences has framed my analysis throughout this course; aptly, I learned this quote is popularly attributed to educational philosopher, John Dewey. To engage in *curre*, in fact, is to do just this, to engage in deep reflection, to ruthlessly examine oneself and one's contexts in order to make meaning, to place oneself and context together (Pinar, 1994). What chance is there for change without self-examination, the courage to lead with love, and the imagination of what might be possible (Byrne-Jiménez & Yoon, 2019)?

Even though I learned valuable lessons by pushing up against the script, I stayed too long; bmy hope is that we pulled my son out in time. After a year of tense conversations following the latex glove incident, he was moved into a different classroom. The teachers in his new classroom employ a "just in time" learning approach, one based upon the Montessori principle of following the child. In this type of learning, the instruction flows from students' interests (Montessori, 1995). When he expressed interest in trees, he was invited to collect leaves while on a nature walk. He then brought them back to the classroom and looked up the type of leaf in a reference book and made his own leaf identification book that he subsequently (and nervously at first) presented to his class. This approach requires humility, flexibility, and trust—trust both in the process of learning and discovery and the mutual trust among the teachers and families that learning will occur, even if not in a traditional, linear sense.

Our son is finally flourishing. In the midst of writing this paper, I overheard him talking with his friend, our neighbor, who attends a different school.

“I really like my school!” he exclaimed.

“Why?” his friend questioned.

“I don’t know ... we just ... we learn stuff,” he paused and smiled. I wondered what activity he was remembering at that moment.

COME TOGETHER: LIVING WITH INTENTIONALITY

As I reflect upon my experiences as a child and student within the Catholic school script, and now as a parent and organizational leader, I’ve learned that it’s extremely difficult to avoid the script. Despite spending countless hours deliberating where to send our children to school and even after selecting an environment we thought would embrace creativity and inquiry, we *still* did not escape the script (although I believe these experiences were undoubtedly fewer than what we would have experienced in a more traditional education setting). And, the script has continued to show up in my workplaces, my children’s scout troops, and even within extended family conversations and expectations. The notion that “this is how you should do it” rears its ugly head so continuously that I wonder if human nature is wired to follow scripts. It’s often simply easier to follow the script.

When I analyze my examples of working against the script as a child, teen, and parent, I notice that the person upholding the script is often avoiding a more difficult path and following the script without even realizing that they are perpetuating it. Early in my life, I pushed against the script without intentionality. I didn’t like being told no. I questioned the hypocrisy that I saw in front of me. But, I did this without a framework, and without actively questioning the power and control that often bolstered the script—or led others to leave it unquestioned. In this “placing together” (Pinar, 1994, p. 27) of my experiences, I’ve come to realize that reflection and intentionality can help me (and my children) sustain a life outside of the script or at least recognize it and openly question its existence and purpose. As parents, my husband and I have welcomed questioning (although, I’ll admit, it’s quite exhausting at times). When one of our children asked why rules exist, we seriously considered our answer and came up with three possibilities: rules exist for safety, for order, or for control. And, we told them that they could question rules that exist only for the sake of control; these are the most dangerous rules.

It’s my hope that we have instilled reflection and intentionality and have begun to build a framework for our children to question the scripts they encounter, as well as to carefully discern when it is time to work against the script from within or to leave it behind (Powell et al., 2017). This can be a daunting reality but one that is too important to ignore. I saw my own son’s spirit get broken before my eyes as he labeled himself a “bad” child. And, I experienced it myself in a toxic, controlled workplace. As I consider parenting, leading, and living against the script, I’m consistently convinced of the importance of imagination and care required in cultivating new spaces where questioning is encouraged, individuality is embraced, and real learning is the goal.

How might workplaces flourish if honest feedback were solicited and acted upon, if leaders responded with empathetic listening instead of defensiveness? How might our school systems be transformed if, instead of measuring against a prescribed set of standards, we were to focus on learning? What might be possible if we were to reexamine the script from an independent lens, especially with the acknowledgement that those who are most prone to be put on a script are those who are already marginalized (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020; Timberlake et al., 2017)? How might

communities be transformed and move along from just “alright” to flourishing (Love, 2018)? It’s too big of a risk not to reexamine these ever-present scripts. The future of our children is at stake.

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