



Multiple Roles and potential Role Conflict of a School Resource Officer: A Case Study of the Midwest Police Department's School Resource Officer Program in the United States

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Abstract

Schools must be a safe environment, not just owing to the commonsensical discourse of wanting children and school employees to be out of harm's way, but also because it produces a better learning environment for students. Having safe schools should thus be a priority for students, parents, educators, policymakers, and the community. The implementation of school resource officers, who theoretically carry out various roles such as counselor, teacher, and law enforcer, is one approach that is becoming increasingly popular to make schools safer. However, some argue that deploying police officers in schools negatively influences students, especially ethnic minority ones. Based on the inconclusive evidence in the literature, this case study examines the Midwest Police Department's School Resource Officer Program implemented in Midwest City Schools (four Grade Schools and one Junior High School). The findings of the presented case study show that these various roles of the school resource officer conflict with one another. Further, of these three roles, law enforcer is the primary role; however, the dominance of this role contributes to the racist practices that already exist in society.

Keywords: School Resource Officer, Racism, Police, Schools.

Introduction

Incidents such as the 1999 Columbine shooting have led some American citizens to conclude that deploying police in schools is the answer to increasing safety. However, while having police in schools can help prevent or react to incidents of extreme violence, there remains a need to re-examine and possibly change the role of school resource officers (SROs) in schools. Under the SRO Program of the Midwest Police Department (MPD), the multiple roles of SROs have the potential to conflict with one another and this potential conflict motivates the research questions of this study:

- Does the program adequately allow for law enforcement responsibilities as well as teaching, counseling, and mentoring duties?

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- Are these added roles conflicting?
- How does the SRO Program help balance the duties of enforcer and counselor?
- Will the SRO Program be influenced by the expectations of the DARE Program?

Based on these research questions, this study aims to gain a better understanding of the SRO Program implemented in Midwest City Schools. In order to achieve this, I gather data from a number of sources including documentation, interviews, and observations. Through this data collection process, I examine real-life cases in order to understand the program better.

Violence in Schools and the Use of Zero Tolerance Policies

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is a primary source for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data related to education in the United States. The NCES reports on areas that are considered to be high priority in the field of education such as violence in schools. For the present study, I examined the *Violence in U.S. Public Schools 2000 School Survey on Crime and Safety* in which the use of law enforcement and security personnel is addressed as a way in which to deter potential violence as well as to help principals discipline students after violent behavior occurs. The report found that schools that regularly use law enforcement or security personnel are more likely to experience a violent incident than those that do not (80% vs. 62%) (NCES, 2005). Further, schools that regularly use law enforcement or security personnel are twice as likely to experience a serious violent incident (26% vs. 13%). Although it could be argued that police/security are placed in schools that already have high violence rates, this study hypothesizes that the use of police or security officers in schools does not do what it is intended to do, namely deter crime and violence, and that it can actually have a negative impact in this regard.

Even though US schools use both punitive and intervention strategies for preventing violence, emphasis is placed on the former in the form of “zero tolerance policies” (Casella, 2003). It has been argued that zero tolerance policies place minority students at more of a disadvantage compared with white students. For example, the American Bar Association released the following statement opposing zero tolerance (Harris, 2005):

[Zero tolerance policies have] redefined students as criminals, with unfortunate consequences. Building Blocks for Youth reports that, “in the 1970’s, the number of youth suspensions has nearly doubled from 3.7% of students in 1974 (1.7 million students suspended) to 6.8% of students in 1998 (3.2 million student suspended) (African American students are suspended at roughly 2.3 times the rate of White students nationally. Children of color are subjected to far more suspensions and expulsions than their White counterparts. According to the Department of Education, African American children made up only 17% of public enrollment nationwide in 1998-99, but 32% of suspensions. White students make up 63% of enrollment and represented only 50% of suspensions and 50% of expulsions. In Tennessee during the 2000 school year, the rate of suspension for African Americans was double that of White students. In the 1999-2000 school years in Connecticut, nearly 52% of suspensions of kindergartners went to African Americans, 35.2% to Latinos and 12.1% to Whites” (p. 56).

Strict discipline can have long-term negative impacts on young people, particularly minority groups, far beyond just harming their ability to “keep up” and be successful students. Having strict discipline policies may affect teachers’ pedagogies and their abilities to interact with students. Moreover, from a broader perspective, society overall is impacted by these policies in the fight for social justice. New rules and laws, although considered to be “fair” because race is supposedly a neutral factor, in fact reproduce racism in the form of racial projects. Robbins (2005) addressed this supposed neutrality in zero tolerance policies in schools.

Moreover, the supposed neutrality of zero tolerance permits authority to be indifferent to history and color and how these considerations impact the perception of crime ... These sedimentations of racist justifications for the subordination of African Americans now become even more corrosive and elusive in an age of hyper-individualism, that is, as GFSA 1994 legislates school zero tolerance policies that atomize responsibility and accountability for violence and disruption in schools. Thus, certain forms of teacher and administrative authority, unintentionally or intentionally, reproduce racist beliefs about who is dangerous and in what environments, by permitting teachers to refuse to learn why and how certain groups communicate in different ways than their own (pp. 8–9).

How have we gotten to where we are today? Zero tolerance policies have transformed from strategies that were meant to keep schools safe (e.g., through the 1994 Gun-Free Schools Act that prohibits firearms on school property) to expelling a student for minor undesirable actions such as verbal disputes or disruptive behaviors that are considered to be bad behavior or have the potential for violence. How has this happened?

The Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s and early 1970s slowed with the emergence of the social and economic crisis (Giroux, 2003). This development brought about a growing shift at all levels of government from an emphasis on social investment to one on public control, social containment, and the criminalization of social problems (Giroux, 2003). During the 1980s and early 1990s, the US government continued its “get tough on crime” ideology and “war on drugs” with such rules as “three strikes” and “mandatory minimum sentencing.” During this same era, policies that aimed to prevent violence in schools were derived from this same “get tough on crime” philosophy.

According to Casella (2003), national initiatives such as the implementation of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 that were meant to keep schools safe fall into one of the following three categories: 1) violence prevention and conflict resolution programs in schools; 2) gun control laws; and 3) punitive and judicial forms of discipline. However, emphasis has been placed on the second and third initiatives, which are types of punitive discipline. These zero tolerance policies of schools mirror the government’s ideology of combating crime. Since the passage of the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994, zero tolerance policies (at least in some form) have therefore become the norm in US schools (Skiba, 2000).

Defining zero tolerance as a policy that mandates predetermined consequences or punishments for specified offenses, the National Center on Education Statistics report, *Violence in America’s Public Schools: 1996-97* (Heaviside et al., 1998), found that 94% of all schools have zero tolerance policies for weapons or firearms, 87% for alcohol, while 79% report mandatory suspensions or expulsions for violence or tobacco (p. 3).

Giroux (2003) stated that these policies, which were originally invoked against students who brought guns to school, have broadened over time, and they now include a range of behavioral infractions that range from possessing drugs to harboring a weapon to threatening another student. Further, those most affected by zero tolerance policies are groups of young ethnic minorities, as articulated by Giroux (2003):

Most insidiously, zero-tolerance laws, while a threat to all youth and any viable notion of equal opportunity through education, reinforce in the public imagination the image of students of color as a source of public fears and a threat to public school safety. Zero-tolerance policies and laws appear to be well tailored for mobilizing racialized codes and race-based moral panics that portray black and brown urban youth as a frightening and violent threat to the safety of “decent” Americans (p. 562).

Examples of this move to punitive actions for minor offenses (especially involving young ethnic minorities) are given in a report by the Advancement Project and Civil Rights Project (2000):

A 14-year-old boy mistakenly left a pocketknife in his book bag after a Boy Scout camping trip. At his hearing, the boy's Scout Master testified on the boy's behalf. The student was expelled under the district's Zero tolerance Policy, which requires expulsion for possession of knives (p. 5).

An African-American 9th grader was expelled for one year from a predominantly white school district and sent to an alternative school because she had sparklers in her book bag. She had used them over the weekend and forgot they were in her bag (p. 5).

A four-year-old African-American child was suspended for one day because he allegedly pushed and shoved his classmates on the playground. The kindergartner's mother complained that she was not notified of his behavior and thus was not given an opportunity to correct the behavior (p. 6).

An African-American honors student attending school in a predominantly white school district was suspended from school indefinitely for fighting. This was her first disciplinary referral (p. 6).

If the government's plan was to prevent crime by making people “think twice” before committing criminal actions based on the severity of the resulting punishments, it has more realistically become a crime prevention tactic simply by keeping those who commit crimes locked up. Indeed, the number of individuals incarcerated in the United States has skyrocketed to over two million, according to the Department of Justice (2009). According to Casella (2003), zero tolerance policies aim to prevent violence by punishing young people for their potential for violence and/or their displayed dangerousness. Hence, if zero tolerance policies in schools were also designed to prevent violence owing to the harsh consequences, they have had a similar effect by keeping those children out of school.

It would be logical to conclude that when students are disciplined (e.g., suspended, expelled and sent to another room in the building); they miss out on learning opportunities. If a student is suspended or expelled from school, they are not in class and

thus fall further behind, making it difficult to succeed in school. The disciplining of students also creates a negative view of teachers, the school itself, and learning in the minds of disciplined students. Because students (primarily young minority groups) are disciplined, they stop wanting to learn and even begin to develop negative views of themselves, as articulated by Harris (2005):

Many African American students do not see themselves as teaching material. Many teachers do not share the same cultural background; many African American students are made to endure negative comments, and are judged by their economic backgrounds. However, it is this educational system that unjustly chastises and fails so many African American students each year through zero tolerance and racial profiling. Ensuring student safety should and will continue to be high priority, yet it should not come at the cost of a decent education for African American students (p. 58).

Unfortunately, those students most often disciplined in this manner are the most “at-risk” children in their communities that are already struggling academically. These children are not only at-risk in school, but also at-risk in society, particularly students of color, as indicated by Casella (2003):

If discipline policy is going to simply punish all individuals caught in confrontations, then poor Latino and African American youths will be punished the most because they are more likely to be involved in confrontations than middle-class Caucasians primarily due to structural factors regarding high rates of violence in neighborhoods and families, social isolation, and lack of access to job opportunities. This is associated with another consequence: that punishment negatively affects those who are already negatively affected by poverty, racism, academic failure and other realities (p. 879).

Indeed, students that are most likely to receive the severest punishments are those with learning disabilities, those in foster care or under some type of protective custody, and those that are homeless or on free or reduced lunch programs (Noguera, 2003). Similarly, students who are not able to keep up in the classroom often display disruptive behavior through frustration or embarrassment (Noguera, 2003). Therefore, those students that need the most help, namely those that would not stand a legitimate chance to succeed without school, are most likely not to receive the education they need and deserve.

Research design

Data Source

In 1996, the MPD began a traditional DARE Program in its Grade Schools. From August 2005, the City Board and School Board agreed to implement an SRO Program in its Grade Schools and Junior High School. The primary goals of the DARE Program were somewhat different to those of the SRO Program. The philosophy of the DARE Program was for the SRO to be the students’ teacher and counselor. By contrast, the SRO Program’s philosophy was for the officer to be primarily responsible for safety in schools with the roles of teacher and counselor secondary. The DARE Program remains popular with the community and schools.

Methodology

Given that the presented case study aims to understand the SRO Program better and further examine the roles and responsibilities of the SRO, it was necessary to shadow an SRO during a normal working day. I was able to shadow Officer Schmidt for a full eight-hour workday, which he described as a typical day. My observations helped me better understand the program and the specific roles of the SRO as well as discover new issues and questions that cannot be fully answered in this research project.

Written documentation from various sources also provided pertinent data. I read the MPD's policies and procedures; however, very little was found in these that related to the SRO Program. Further, the schools' policies provided no information on the SRO Program. The primary documentation about the program was a Memorandum of Understanding between the MPD (City of Midwest) and Midwest School Districts. This document is referred to within this research paper. I also located some documentation in meeting minutes involving school officials, city officials, and police personnel. The final form of documentation was local newspaper articles, some of which were printed as this paper was being written.

Data were also gathered from interviews with those directly and/or indirectly involved in the program. From a police perspective, I interviewed the SRO as well as the Deputy Chief who oversees the program. The school perspective was obtained from interviews with a teacher and an administrator at Midwest City Schools.

Findings

1. Law Enforcement Role

In order to examine the extent and construction of the law enforcement role of the program, I begin by presenting a detailed description of the law enforcement duties observed while shadowing Officer Schmidt, who is positioned in the "patrol division" in the police department's chain of command. As expected, much of what Officer Schmidt does during a normal workday involves law enforcement; however, the extent to which Officer Schmidt fills this law enforcement role is more significant than expected, as the case below demonstrates.

It is 7:30 a.m., and Officer Schmidt is sitting at one of the computers in the squad room. He is approached by a fellow officer who has worked the midnight shift and is working overtime until noon. Officer Wilson explains to Officer Schmidt that he just responded to a report of a theft, and the suspect is a juvenile with whom most officers in the department have had contact. Wilson tells Officer Schmidt that the juvenile's father is upset with his son and will be taking him out of school this morning and bringing him to the station to be interviewed. Wilson and Schmidt realize that the father was just recently released from prison and is on parole. Schmidt, while at the computer, enters the juvenile's name into the data bank and the results show 20 previous contacts with the juvenile as a suspect of theft. The two officers discuss the best action to take and Wilson says he will call Schmidt if he needs any assistance.

It could be argued that this scenario is both a law enforcement duty and a counseling duty depending on the decision on how to handle this case. The disposition of juvenile cases can vary from counseling to home restrictions to reaching the court system. With the previous contacts noted, it is likely that this case will reach the extent of court intervention, thus making it a law enforcement role.

At 7:45 a.m., Officer Schmidt makes his way to the front of the school, where he is stopped by one of the teachers, Mrs. Sommers. Mrs. Sommers is a few yards behind Officer Schmidt in the hallway, and she hollers to get his attention. “Steve,” she says, and then she quickly corrects herself to “Officer Schmidt,” realizing students are entering the building. It is reported by Mrs. Sommers that a student’s bike has been stolen from the front school yard. Mrs. Sommers passes on the suspect’s description to Officer Schmidt along with his/her direction of travel. Officer Schmidt radios this information to patrol and remains in the building.

Officer Schmidt retrieves his keys and unlocks his office, located just down the hallway from the main offices and entrance to the school. He walks into his office and sits at his desk. The office is no bigger than a janitor’s closet. Next to Officer Schmidt’s desk are two cushioned chairs, scrunched in between two large metal filing cabinets. Stacked on the officer’s desk are police reports, many handwritten memos, and a large computer screen and keyboard. Officer Schmidt turns on his computer and begins reading the stack of memos.

Officer Schmidt has been investigating the theft of a student’s iPod, which was returned by Cindrea, who said she found it on the floor in the hallway. The other student involved in the possession of the iPod is Cindrea’s friend, Tyrell. Officer Schmidt has been watching video of the day the iPod was taken. The entire school is videotaped and Officer Schmidt has access to these videos. He believes he can determine how and when the iPod was taken if he observes videotape from that particular day. Officer Schmidt walks into a room to access the video he had been looking at the day before. It is 9:45 a.m. and he rewinds the video to watch for a third time when his cell phone rings, and he recognizes it as the Junior High Office. Officer Schmidt stands up and starts to walk out the door. He knows that if the office calls him when he is already in the school, it is usually some type of disturbance where he is needed right away. It is Mr Wilmington, the principal, explaining in a hurried voice that a student who is threatening to harm a teacher is causing a disturbance near the entrance of the school. Officer Schmidt picks up the pace, puts his phone away, and removes his glasses and puts them safely in his pocket.

The student ran from the school grounds before Officer Schmidt reaches Mr Wilmington at the school entrance. Officer Schmidt passes this information to dispatch so that patrol officers in the area can attempt to locate the student. Officer Schmidt heads toward his DARE vehicle, gets in, and leaves to help locate the missing student.

Once the student is located, the incident is resolved by the student going home instead of back to school. An offense report will be written by Officer Schmidt about the threat, and Mr Wilmington will decide on how long to suspend the student. Owing to the student’s extensive criminal history, including time spent in a detention center, the report will be sent to the State’s Attorney’s Office for review. A decision will be made there as to the prosecution of the juvenile with criminal charges.

Officer Schmidt returns to the video room and watches video of Cindrea stealing the iPod and giving it to Tyrell to hide in his locker. Officer Schmidt realizes that it is in fact a theft and not found property. At 10:15 a.m., he meets with Mr Wilmington and explains that Cindrea stole the iPod and Tyrell had possession of it for most of the day, knowing it was stolen. Officer Schmidt wants to handle Cindrea by issuing a station adjustment and requests that Mr Wilmington handle Tyrell administratively only, which is within the school. Mr Wilmington, who has been dealing with Tyrell for other school

problems all year, requests that Officer Schmidt also issue a station adjustment to Tyrell. Officer Schmidt agrees to Mr Wilmington's request.

By 10:50 a.m., Officer Schmidt is en route to the police station in his DARE vehicle with Cindrea and Tyrell. On his police radio, he calls in the opening miles for transporting the two students. It is common police procedure for the officer to advise the dispatcher of the patrol vehicle of the opening miles when transporting people, which helps in the defense of the officer if there are allegations that they were taken somewhere other than directly to the police station. Officer Schmidt arrives at the rear of the station and calls in his closing miles. Once at the station, he learns more about Cindrea and Tyrell, who both live with Cindrea's mother. Tyrell walked home one day from school and the house was empty. Tyrell said his mom is a drug addict and she just "up and left." Therefore, for a while Tyrell was living out of his locker at school, keeping there his few clothes and belongings. One night, while visiting Cindrea at her house, Cindrea's mother said he should probably be getting home because his mother would be worrying about him. Tyrell and Cindrea told her mother about Tyrell being homeless, so Cindrea's mother just took him in as her own. Tyrell has been living there for a few months now.

Cindrea's mom arrives at the station at 2:00 p.m. to pick up her daughter and Tyrell. The mother, Cindrea, Tyrell, and Officer Schmidt sit and discuss the offense and consequences. A station adjustment form is completed by Officer Schmidt as part of his Juvenile Officer duties. Records indicate that neither Cindrea nor Tyrell have had much police contact involving other offenses, but Tyrell admits to being suspended from school on two other occasions this year. The terms of the station adjustment are agreed upon:

An apology letter to the victim of the theft

- Meet with a Juvenile Officer once a week
- A 200-word essay about why it was wrong to have stolen the iPod
- All must be completed within 30 days

It is 2:30 p.m. and Officer Schmidt is just finishing teaching his DARE lesson when he is handed two folders from a teacher, Mrs Banks. They are the language arts folders belonging to Jose and Roberto. Officer Schmidt starts to walk down the hallway to meet with the principal about the folders. He looks at the fronts and backs of the folders and recognizes the gang graffiti.

Jose and Roberto enter the office to speak with Officer Schmidt and the principal. This requires no more than counseling by Officer Schmidt and the principal. Roberto explains that in California, the "Vice Lords" were a popular gang, and he recently watched a movie with his father that had gangs in it. The two students are counseled on the dangers of gang affiliation and on how this may cause concern for the principal, teachers, and other students. The two, who are concerned more about losing their folders than being in trouble, are assured that they will be given new folders before they have a lesson in language arts.

It is 3:20 p.m. and Officer Schmidt's day is coming to an end. He meets Mr Wilmington in the hallway and they discuss Cindrea and Tyrell as they enter the open door of the assistant principal's office.

2. Counselor Role

The role of counselor in the SRO Program is not considered to be as significant as the law enforcement role. This role may be purposefully downplayed or law enforcement just seems to be more necessary more often. The role of counselor is more covert. However, while it is less obvious that this role exists, it does play a part in the program.

There were two incidents where Officer Schmidt worked as a counselor. In both incidents, the counseling sessions were part of the disposition of juvenile offenses. In other words, once it was determined that an offense had been committed, it is part of the follow-up for Officer Schmidt, regardless of the outcome, to counsel the offenders about their actions and decisions in order to help decrease the likelihood of recidivism. These two incidents were detailed in the previous law enforcement section. One involves the counseling of Cindrea and Tyrell on their actions regarding the theft of the iPod. The second counseling incident involves the talk with Roberto and Jose about the gang signs on their folders.

The only other incidents that demanded a counselor were positive greetings or contacts that occurred in the morning as the children were entering school. These incidents are included in this section because the demeanors of Officer Schmidt and the children seemed to be sincere and trusting. This seems to be important to the counseling function since a good rapport is necessary for this role to be successful.

It is 7:45 a.m., and children are entering the building as Officer Schmidt stands in the busy hallway waiting to enter his office. Students pass by Officer Schmidt, and although in a hurry, most say something like “Good morning Officer Schmidt.” Officer Schmidt seems to know everyone by name as he returns the greeting. Very quickly, the hallway empties except for one small African American boy with books in his arms, almost too heavy to carry. The boy stops at Officer Schmidt’s doorway and uses the doorway to hold his books. The boy looks in at Officer Schmidt, who is sitting at his desk and asks, “What’s up?” Officer Schmidt replies, “What’s up, Trey, on your way to class?” Trey says, “Yep,” and the two trade smiles before Trey continues down the hall. There were many such casual, friendly interactions throughout the day between Officer Schmidt and the students.

3. Teacher Role

The teacher role is more significant than the counselor role in that it is more stable and planned, primarily owing to the DARE Program and other “scheduled” teaching assignments.

By 7:50 a.m., the children are in their classrooms as Officer Schmidt unlocks his office and enters. On one of the filing cabinets is a 1997 Trophy for the “Winning Float” for the DARE entry in the 4th July Parade. On the other wall is an old wooden bookcase. There are stacks of flyers with rubber bands holding them together. The flyers are on various topics such as “Say No To Drugs,” “Bike Safety,” and “Driving Under the Influence.” Officer Schmidt uses these flyers in his scheduled teachings as well as community events such as bike rodeos, youth scout meetings, and church presentations.

Behind him is a large poster of a number of parachutists holding hands in a perfect circle. The poster reads “TEAMWORK,” followed by “When we all work together we all win together.” Owing to the limited wall space in the small office, an “Illini” basketball poster is taped to the side of one of the filing cabinets.

It is 1:30 p.m. and time for the DARE lesson. Officer Schmidt walks into Mrs Banks' fifth grade classroom, and a few students straighten up in their seats. Some remain slouched with one arm or both supporting their head. It is a warm day, and the children have played outside. Some have sweat on their faces, while others are fanning themselves with paper or their folders. Mrs Banks is a first year teacher who was born about the time Officer Schmidt was sworn in as a police officer. She is wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans, maybe because it is Friday or maybe because she is a younger teacher.

The classroom has no student desks; it only has tables, with two children seated per table. Mrs Banks' desk is in the corner of the room near the windows, but she lectures from the front of the room, near the doorway. Located on the wall behind this area is a green chalkboard. The students keep their supplies in a row of lockers against one wall. It looks as though the wall used to be part of a hallway and is now in the fifth grade classroom. Many ceiling tiles are missing, almost in a prearranged pattern. The windows are open, but only warm air can be felt by those closest to the windows.

Officer Schmidt begins his presentation by asking the class what is new since the last time he was there. One student tells Officer Schmidt that she has seen the movie *A Night at the Museum*, one explains about a recent injury and another states that she has celebrated two Mother's Days due to the Mexican Mother's Day being on a different day to the American Mother's Day. Of course, the class was curious about the presence of the researcher, and Officer Schmidt explained why I was there.

Officer Schmidt then went to the DARE question box where students can anonymously ask the DARE Officer questions. The class knew that Officer Schmidt had been injured while on duty and that his shoulder was still recovering. He unfolds the first paper, which had been folded at least seven or eight times, and reads the question aloud: "How is your shoulder, is it getting better?" Officer Schmidt tells the class he appreciates their concern for him and he assures them it is getting better every day.

He then asks everyone to get out their DARE workbooks and turn to pages 24 and 25. He begins maneuvering around the room, between tables, getting different students involved in the discussion. "Give me four ways to stay out of risky situations," requests Officer Schmidt. One young man raises his hand and says, "Make sure you are with friends and make sure those friends aren't troublemakers – because if they do drugs, you might decide to do drugs, too." After several more good answers, and a discussion on each, Officer Schmidt directs another question toward the class, "Can you give me five ways of getting out of risky situations." He calls on a young female, who explains to the class that, "If somebody wants me to smoke pot with them, I just say, 'No thanks, I want to keep all of my brain cells.'" This leads onto a discussion on how many brain cells you start with in life and how many you lose from doing things such as smoking pot.

After completing pages 24 and 25, Officer Schmidt asks everyone to think of one important thing they remember from their very first lesson with him earlier in the school year. A girl raises her hand and says in a very proud voice, "When you were young, you wanted to be a cowboy." Officer Schmidt grins and quietly laughs and says, "Well, I'm not sure how important that is, but does anyone remember why I didn't become a cowboy?" A boy shouts out, without being called on, "Because your wife wouldn't let you?" Officer Schmidt says, "I'm not sure how my wife would feel about that – but, no, that's not why." A quieter girl raises her hand about halfway, and she is called on. In a very sincere voice, she says, "Because your mom wouldn't let you?" Officer Schmidt says that that answer is very close, and a few more students raise their hands. Officer Schmidt

calls on another girl, and she says proudly, “Because your mom wouldn’t buy you a horse.” “Yes,” says Officer Schmidt, “That is exactly right.” He then continues with discussions on previous lessons.

Two Hispanic children sitting together at a table raise their hands for many answers. Jose and Roberto seem to be engaged in the lesson; however, soon after they are taken out of class and they report to the office to talk to Officer Schmidt and the principal about the gang symbols on their folders. This is not their only such interaction with Officer Schmidt and the principal, yet they show great interest in the lesson, which rejects much of what the two seem to get in trouble for.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this case study was to examine the multiple roles of a School Resource Officer and the potential conflict of these roles. Specifically, does the program adequately allow for law enforcement responsibilities as well as teaching, counseling, and mentoring duties? In this particular case study, the SRO is also a DARE officer and there were concerns as to whether the SRO program be influenced by this. Based on observations and interviews concerns are discussed.

Even though the SRO Program calls for education, counseling, and law enforcement, the law enforcement aspect of the program seems to dominate the three roles in practice. The people involved in the program have varying perceptions of which of these three roles are emphasized. However, the power to determine how the program is actually implemented rests with the particular police officer assigned to the school. According to the Deputy Chief, since the inception of the program, the SRO has increased his juvenile offender contacts dramatically. This result indicates that since the change from DARE Officer to SRO Officer, Schmidt has increased his law enforcement duties.

Mr Wilmington (the principal) believes that the primary responsibility of the program is law enforcement and supports the work of the SRO. Mr Wilmington’s straightforward disciplinarian approach and philosophy welcomes Officer Schmidt into the school as a “policeman who has an office in my building.”

Mrs Weber (a teacher) sees the law enforcement responsibility as a part of the program. She says, “He tells the kids, ‘I’m a cop and you’re a kid ... I might have to arrest one of you ... I don’t like to do that but it’s my job.’” He explains how he respects students and that they need to respect him. In addition, he states that a police officer in a school is just that – a police officer with the power of arrest. Whether you ask the officer, teachers, administrators, or students, all agree that the police officer is a law enforcement officer who can make arrests, keep order, and investigate crimes as necessary.

Surprisingly, the principal does not see Officer Schmidt as a counselor. Even more surprisingly, the principal does not seem to want this role for the SRO. The principal finds the SRO’s greatest value to be as a law enforcement officer.

While shadowing Officer Schmidt, I found that much of his time is spent on law enforcement duties. He spent a major proportion of his day investigating a theft, eventually arresting two Junior High students. Even when giving his DARE presentation at the elementary school, he ended by investigating gang graffiti. Officer Schmidt was also involved in a crime involving a teacher being threatened by a student. Therefore, at least on this particular day, he spent the majority of his time performing law enforcement duties. There was also a major emphasis on this particular role by the Deputy Chief and

the principal. Of the eight-hour workday, the SRO spent 14% of his time counseling, 16% of his time teaching, and 70% in the role of law enforcer.

In order to examine whether the roles of the SRO conflict with one another, I paid close attention to particular incidents throughout the day. The following are four noteworthy incidents. The first case of role conflict involves Officer Schmidt's investigation of the missing iPod. Because of the investigation and subsequent juvenile arrest, he had to change the time of his DARE presentation, implying that his law enforcement/investigation role takes precedence over his teaching role.

Second, another case of role conflict or roles colliding involves Officer Schmidt transporting Cindrea and Tyrell to the police station. It was during this time that Officer Schmidt learned that Tyrell was homeless and out of necessity had moved in with Cindrea. This incident required counseling and empathy, which are difficult to perform at the time of arrest and transportation. How Officer Schmidt followed up on Tyrell's situation is unclear.

Third, role conflict appeared during the DARE lesson with Mrs Weber's class. During the lesson, although Jose and Roberto seemed to be engaged in the interaction, they ended up having to discuss their misbehavior for writing gang signs on their folders. Almost instantaneously, therefore, Officer Schmidt went from DARE Officer to police officer. Hence, is this a conflict or an excellent example of the officer managing his roles?

Finally, the last idea of role conflict seems to be a broader issue that occurs over time. During students' early years in grade school, the SRO works as a DARE Officer to teach, mentor, and gain their trust and thus encourage students to confess to crimes and explain other offenses involving their classmates. It is debatable whether this is a conflict or even an ethical issue for the trust and power position of the SRO.

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