

# Chapter 5

## Education and Expertise in Law Enforcement: Developing Skilled Officers

### ABSTRACT

*Chapter 5 describes that the complex interplay between higher education and police reform underscores a critical need to reshape policing through transformative learning. Historically, through leaders like August Vollmer, Robert Peel, and others, he championed education as an essential component for improving police-community relations, promoting empathy, ethics, and professionalism within police departments. Vollmer's early initiatives, rooted in higher education, sought to elevate the standards of policing by integrating humanities-based curricula. These educational foundations aimed to foster trust, reduce misconduct, and establish a new ethical framework for police officers, thereby addressing systemic issues that have long plagued law enforcement. Vollmer's pioneering efforts led to the creation of the first police academy in the United States, which included formal education in liberal arts to instill humanistic values essential for police interactions.*

### INTRODUCTION

Sherwin utilized Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development to highlight the need for transformative education within policing by developing my own theory that is applied in reverse order. Sherwin's reverse developmental transformative learning theory is predicated on reversing socially objectionable learning. In other words, unlearning biased or harmful perspectives. By collaborating with police officers who have a liberal arts background, those without such education can be exposed to humanistic values, prompting self-reflection and enhancing their ability to address social issues. This shared learning space promotes a gradual,

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empathy-driven shift in attitudes, which is pivotal for rebuilding trust between police and citizens. This reverse zone of proximal development fosters not only individual growth but also collective transformation within police culture, where police officers learn to navigate complex social interactions more sensitively and responsively.

The broader liberal arts education equips police officers with critical skills in thinking, speaking, and writing, skills that Zakaria (2015) identifies as essential for effective communication and ethical decision-making. In challenging situations, such abilities enable police officers to engage constructively with the public, de-escalate conflicts, and approach law enforcement with a democratic ethos grounded in respect and understanding. A liberal arts curriculum, with its emphasis on cultural awareness, social justice, and ethical reflection, enriches police officers' perspectives, encouraging a shift away from an "us versus them" mentality and toward a collaborative, community-centered approach.

This transformative learning process is essential in preparing police officers for the demands of modern society, where issues of racial bias, mental health, and justice require nuanced, empathetic responses. Scholars argue that microaggressions and implicit biases are deeply rooted in social conditioning and often manifest in law enforcement practices. Through education, these biases can be critically examined, allowing police officers to move beyond prejudiced mindsets. Engaging police officers in a curriculum that challenges preconceived notions fosters accountability, self-awareness, and respect for diverse communities.

To facilitate such reform, police departments should prioritize recruiting candidates with liberal arts degrees and encourage existing police officers to pursue higher education. This approach promotes sustained, positive change, fostering a force that embodies humanistic principles. Moreover, adopting community youth programs can strengthen the police-citizen relationship by providing opportunities for police officers and community members to engage constructively. These programs foster reciprocal learning and encourage youths to view law enforcement as allies rather than adversaries, setting the stage for long-term trust and cooperation.

Ultimately, transformative learning in policing offers a sustainable model for reform, one that addresses both the personal growth of police officers and structural changes within law enforcement. By nurturing humanistic values through a liberal education, police departments can cultivate a more responsive, ethical, and effective force, capable of meeting the challenges of a diverse and evolving society. Such reform is not only achievable but necessary for fostering a future in which police officers are genuinely committed to serving and protecting all community members with respect, empathy, and integrity.

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