

Are You Doing Inquiry Along These Lines?

INQUIRY INTO THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

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"Are You Doing Inquiry Along These Lines?" describes proposed or current scholarly work around which networks of researchers might be formed. Those interested in specific research paradigms, problems or questions, inquiry approaches, or other related aspects of curriculum and/or supervision may use this Journal as a contact point for communicating informally. Anyone wishing to suggest a focus for such a network should prepare a brief sketch of the particular research interest and submit it, along with the name and address of the contact person, to the editors for consideration

Anything that is hidden is difficult to find or define. Various writers on the topic have attempted to clarify what the expression *hidden curriculum* means to them. Douglas Barnes used it in a discussion of the curriculum "proper" to mean unintended consequences, as well as advertised intentions.¹ Some writers such as Robin Barrow do not want to include reference to the hidden curriculum in a definition of curriculum itself. Barrow says:

... we should make a positive distinction between the curriculum, which refers to what we deliberately and overtly provide, and the hidden curriculum which refers to what is unknowingly and/or covertly put across. Things that may be true and important about putting French in the curriculum may very well not be true of the fact a school subtly preaches patriotism through the hidden curriculum. We shall certainly want to talk about both what we teach and what students learn, but that does not require that the word "curriculum" should be taken to cover both. Indeed, to define the word in such a way may serve to obscure the distinction between the two.²

Elliot Eisner calls the hidden curriculum the "implicit" curriculum, which is made up of values and expectations that are generally not included in the

¹Douglas Barnes, *From Communication to Curriculum* (Harmondsworth, England. Penguin Books, 1976), p. 17

²Robin Barrow, *Giving Teaching Back to Teachers. A Critical Introduction to Curriculum Theory* (London, Ontario: The Althouse Press, 1984), pp. 10-11.

formal curriculum but are learned by students during their school experience.³ According to Jane Martin, "... a hidden curriculum consists of some of the outcomes or by-products of schools or of nonschool settings, particularly those states which are learned yet are not openly intended." Later in the same article she adds, "A hidden curriculum consists of those learning states of a setting which are either unintended or intended but not openly acknowledged to the learners in the setting unless the learners are aware of them."⁴

David Gordon has reviewed the literature in the field and found that most definitions or characterizations on this subject can be divided into three distinct schools of thought. The first is called the *outcomes* definition in which the focus is on nonacademic learnings that are promoted by the schools (e.g., attitudes, values, dispositions, social skills, and dominant myths). In the second definition, the most important issue is *school environment*. Specifically, the school's physical and social environments contain many hidden messages for students about social arrangements, relationships, and physical setting. Finally, the third school of thought places emphasis on *modes of influence*, and in the case of the hidden curriculum the influence is felt to be unconscious and unplanned.⁵

What do these various definitions help to point out about the hidden curriculum? How the hidden curriculum is defined appears to be a matter of importance because the hidden curriculum affects students, who are the consumers of the educational system, in a number of ways. Anything that is learned in school, whether intentionally or unintentionally, will influence the character and direction of an individual's life.

Many questions must be answered in regard to the hidden curriculum, and thus it should be the focus of educational research. Some of the questions that must be analyzed include:

1. What do you do with a hidden curriculum once it is found?
2. Are its effects positive or negative?
3. Is the hidden curriculum presented in an unintentional or intentional way?
4. Whose values are put forward?
5. How effective is a school's hidden curriculum?
6. What are students actually learning from a school's hidden curriculum?
7. Does a hidden curriculum exist only in a school setting?

These questions and others like them touch on philosophical, economic, social, historical, and political issues regarding the character of education.

³Elliot W. Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 74-83.

⁴Jane R. Martin, "What Should We Do with a Hidden Curriculum When We Find One?" *Curriculum Inquiry* 6, 2 (1976): 144.

⁵David Gordon, "The Concept of the Hidden Curriculum," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 16, 2 (1982): 187-198

Thus it appears that the concept of the hidden curriculum has far-reaching implications and consequences. The intent and view of individuals studying the phenomena at a certain time and place will probably influence the particular direction that their research and commentary will take. It will be difficult to make or find generalizations about the hidden curriculum, and it will therefore be up to individuals in diverse educational settings to decide what direction to take in those particular settings.

Historically, it appears that what is now called the hidden curriculum was not hidden because the school in the United States during the nineteenth century explicitly served a social control function.

During the period before 1830, according to Elizabeth Vallance,⁶ little formal schooling existed in the country and the burden of socialization fell heavily on the family and the church. However, the family structure began to break down as children became more independent and women gained more power. Schools were founded, and they fulfilled a nationalistic requirement to make the country more homogeneous and also maintain class difference peacefully. The welfare of the public was the most important concern, and as the schools transmitted a common culture, there was not much regard for the individual.

The period between 1830 and 1860 saw the beginning of urban education in the United States and the growth of the Common School crusade to establish a public school system. Although there was concern for the individual, the primary goal of education was to maintain the status quo, assimilate an increasing number of immigrants into the prevailing culture, and keep the peace. School was seen as "an active socializing agent to guarantee stability in the face of the growing diversity of the populace."⁷

After the Civil War, the district school pattern emerged nationwide. Assertive socialization remained more a pattern of urban than rural schools, where moralism was of increased concern. The cities were made up of diverse ethnic groups living to a large degree in slum conditions. Schools were tied to political organizations that were inefficient and corrupt. There was a movement in the interest of scientific management to centralize school operations in order to make them more efficient. Stress was placed on homogeneity, efficiency, and obedience to authority. Along with the basic content areas, punctuality, regularity, attention, and silence were taught to students to ensure a smooth transition from childhood to life in an industrialized society. "Socialization into the industrial mode was the express purpose of the curricular and organizational structure of schools and remained so through the end of the century."⁸

⁶Elizabeth Vallance, "Hiding the Hidden Curriculum. An Interpretation of the Language of Justification in Nineteenth-Century Educational Reform," *Curriculum Theory Network* 4, 1 (1973/74): 5-21.

⁷Ibid., p. 12.

⁸Ibid., p. 13.

Vallance makes four generalizations about the character of education in this nation prior to 1900 which support the social control function of the schools.

1. Education evolved as a response to the declining role of the family and local community.
2. Education helped create a national character where none had existed.
3. The school in general favored social over individual concerns.
4. An element of coercive detention was introduced into education toward the end of the nineteenth century.⁹

Other writers such as Apple and King agree with Vallance on her point that what is presently known as the hidden curriculum was openly advocated in the past. They have stated that:

Behind much of the debate about the role of formal education in the United States during the nineteenth century lay a variety of concerns about the standardization of educational environments, about the teaching, through day-to-day school interaction, of moral, normative, and dispositional values, and about economic functionalism. Today these concerns have been termed the "hidden curriculum" . . .¹⁰

During that time in our nation's history, therefore, what today has become known as the hidden curriculum in our schools was justified on political, social, moral, and economic grounds. Our educational system helped unify a diverse population, advanced a common culture, helped teach moral values that were formally learned in the family, and prepared individuals economically for a place in society. Thus, education played a significant and successful role in shaping the United States prior to 1900.

Why did these roles and values that were advocated so openly for our educational system suddenly go underground or become hidden? When did the hidden curriculum become hidden? The answers to these questions must be discussed in order to shed light on the present-day concept of the hidden curriculum. Vallance suggests that:

the hidden curriculum became hidden by the end of the nineteenth century simply because by that point the rhetoric had done its job. Schooling had evolved from a supplementary socializing influence to an active impositional force. By the turn of the century it could be taken for granted that the schools offered an experience sufficiently homogeneous and regimented. The hidden curriculum was well ensconced. . . . Only at this point could the need to provide individuals with the tools of economic and social survival offer a rationale for schooling that would rival, and eventually displace the need to create a homogeneous populace. . . . The clearest confirmation of this process of hiding the hidden curriculum may be a concurrent phenomenon, the rise of public secondary education.¹¹

⁹Ibid., pp. 14–15.

¹⁰Michael W. Apple and Nancy R. King, "What Do Schools Teach?" *Curriculum Inquiry* 6, 4 (1977): 345.

¹¹Elizabeth Vallance, "Hiding the Hidden Curriculum: An Interpretation of the Language of Justification in Nineteenth-Century Educational Reform," *Curriculum Theory Network* 4, 1 (1973/74): 16.

Only when the educational system shifted from one that provided uniform experience for the good of society to a system that was concerned with individual and personal advancement did the values that were so overtly advanced up to 1900 become hidden. What are these values, and how do they affect education in this nation today?

Eisner suggests that all schools teach three types of curriculums: the *explicit*—public announced programs of study; the *implicit*—values and expectations generally not included in the formal curriculum; and the *null* curriculum—what schools do not teach.¹² He tends to suggest, therefore, that the hidden or implicit curriculum is informal and separated from the formal curriculum. One might think that only nonacademic learning occurs from the hidden curriculum, but this is not necessarily so, according to Martin. Curriculum proper sometimes focuses on nonacademic learning such as morals, politics, or vocational skills. A hidden curriculum, meanwhile, has subject matter. It exists at some time and in some place for some learners. There is no particular subject matter associated with the hidden curriculum, and the learning associated with it could be significant or trivial.¹³

Various writers have cited examples of the hidden curriculum at work in schools today. Gail McCutcheon says that “without realizing it, teachers inadvertently train children such things as to be punctual, to do one’s own work, and to be obedient and subservient.”¹⁴ In a study of elementary classrooms, Philip Jackson found examples of student learnings associated with socialization—students learn to function in a crowd, to incur continuous evaluation, and to live under conditions of power.¹⁵ John Eggleston declared a relationship between the stated or formal curriculum and the hidden curriculum in this way:

It could be argued that the purpose of the mathematics curriculum is not only to enable pupils to learn mathematics but also to allow some to understand that they cannot learn mathematics and to acquire a suitable respect for those who can (the teacher and the more able pupils destined for superior occupational status).¹⁶

Students learn to be docile, obedient, to value competition over cooperation, and to stifle their creative impulses.¹⁷

The study of how kindergarten children are socialized into schooling patterns is important because it is the process whereby rules, values, and

¹²Elliot W. Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 74–92

¹³Jane R. Martin, “What Should We Do with a Hidden Curriculum When We Find One?” *Curriculum Inquiry* 6, 2 (1976): 137.

¹⁴Gail McCutcheon, “On the Interpretation of Classroom Observations,” *Educational Researcher* 10 (May 1981): 6.

¹⁵Philip W. Jackson, *Life in Classrooms* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968).

¹⁶John Eggleston, *The Sociology of the School Curriculum* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), pp. 15–16

¹⁷Jane R. Martin, “What Should We Do with a Hidden Curriculum When We Find One?” *Curriculum Inquiry* 6, 2 (1976): 136.

dispositions critical to students' success in education are first learned.¹⁸ Young children who have attended kindergarten programs seem to make a more successful transition into elementary school than do students who have not been involved in this experience. Why is this so?

Kindergarten serves to acclimate children to the classroom environment. Children learn the rules, roles, and relationships that they will experience in subsequent years. The use of praise, rules governing access to materials, the importance of the proper use of time, the control of emotions, and the meanings attached to categories of work all contribute to the socialization of youngsters into formal education. For example, students learn four important skills during the first few weeks of kindergarten, and this is a way for teachers to develop normative and cognitive consensus. These skills include sharing, listening, putting things away, and following the classroom routine.¹⁹

To portray what is taught by the hidden curriculum in various contexts as always being successful and impossible to resist would be misleading. Paul Willis's study of working class youth in England points out that the "lads," or students, in this situation did not sit idly by and accept the normative intellectual and social messages of the school but rather rejected them to maintain a sense of control over the time they spent in school. The "lads," in this situation, were contrasted with the "ear 'oles" who did accept the importance of the educational authority and system that they encountered.²⁰ In a study closer to home, Robert Everhart observed a junior high school in the United States and found that many students did not accept the school's hidden curriculum. Rather, they played the game to a point where they could maintain an active student subculture, have fun, and yet stay out of serious trouble with minimum effort. Everhart said that the ideal student:

... seemed to accept on one level the goals and procedures of the school but at the same time was able to use them for his or her own purposes, purposes that were often quite opposite to those of the institution.²¹

A number of educational experts believe that the hidden curriculum or social organization of a school is more effective than the formal curriculum that is openly announced.²² Because many of these same writers feel that the learning that is done through a school's hidden curriculum is largely negative, there has been an increased call to research and analyze this concept. Tanner and Tanner point out, however, that it should not be assumed that all aspects

¹⁸Michael W. Apple and Nancy R. King, "What Do Schools Teach?" *Curriculum Inquiry* 6, 4 (1977): 348-353.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1977).

²¹Robert B. Everhart, *Reading, Writing, and Resistance. Adolescence and Labor in a Junior High School* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 249.

²²Alex Inkeles and David H. Smith, *Becoming Modern. Individual Change in Six Developing Countries* (Cambridge, Mass.: Howard University Press, 1974).

of a hidden curriculum are negative, some are indeed beneficial.²³ Regardless of which position an individual takes on the positive and negative aspects of the hidden curriculum, it is obviously a subject that should be studied.

Vallance believes that the hidden curriculum and qualitative research have the potential to be helpful if the two can be related. The hidden curriculum is a powerful and an elusive concept. How can the concept of the hidden curriculum become a tool for educational dialogue once it is discovered? Vallance mentions three possibilities: (1) as a tool to describe a problem, (2) as a vehicle for social criticism of schooling, and (3) as a point of view to help open doors to the unknown.²⁴

In a synthesis of research methods, William Schubert cites two chief approaches to find knowledge about the hidden curriculum. One method focuses on the ideological, sociological, and the political aspects of schooling. Young, Apple, and Giroux are among those who argue that "schools must understand that they selectively empower and deny access to goods, services, work, life-styles, sources of meaning, and forms of political participation."²⁵ Thus, the political aspect of the curriculum must be continuously analyzed and monitored.

The second research technique focuses on literary and artistic criticism that starts with the image of the connoisseur. Broudy, Eisner, Willis, and Fraser and Godfrey have all utilized these methods in various fashions to criticize the schools. What do these individuals do?

Essentially, the critic observes, evocatively describes, interprets, and assesses in curricular settings; the goal is to illuminate the context and implications of curriculum, both hidden and intended. . . . Standards of public explication, referential adequacy, and structural corroboration as well as personal and educational significance are offered.²⁶

Ruth Benedict notes that because a culture is oriented in a particular way, individuals in a setting such as a school are so familiar with behavior supported by this orientation that they are blind to what is going on.²⁷ An outside researcher, meanwhile, can call attention to this unconscious pattern of behavior, thus making it accessible to an audience who can then examine it as being appropriate, good, just, moral, beautiful, or negative.²⁸

Kathleen Wilcox advocates the use of ethnographic techniques to study a school's implicit or hidden curriculum. The focus in this type of research is

²³Daniel Tanner and Laurel N. Tanner, *Curriculum Development: Theory into Practice*, 2d ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 39-40.

²⁴Elizabeth Vallance, "The Hidden Curriculum and Qualitative Inquiry as States of Mind," *Journal of Education* (Boston University) 162 (Winter 1980): 140-141.

²⁵William H. Schubert, "Curriculum Research," in *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, 5th ed., ed. Harold E. Mitzel (New York: Macmillan, 1982), p. 427.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934)

²⁸Gail McCutcheon, "On the Interpretation of Classroom Observations," *Educational Researcher* 10 (May 1981): 6.

on a setting and how participants such as teachers and students understand it. She says:

This focus has involved a view and an explanation of educational personnel as active cultural beings, suffused with the orientation of the culture, rather than as neutral dispensers of information about reading, writing, and arithmetic. The transmission of that which is implicit in the culture can be thought of as including a set of skills, different from those taught in the formal curriculum, of values, of motivational strategies and goals, of self-images, of relationships to peers and authorities. . . .²⁹

The study of the hidden curriculum, therefore, can provide a much broader perspective of education in this nation and in particular settings. Consideration must be given to political forces, values, norms, and sociological and economic factors when studying schooling. Schools and educational personnel do not exist in a vacuum but reflect the dominant culture of which they are a part. Therefore, the fact that schools teach much more than what is formally announced is not surprising.

Yet the hidden curriculum must be examined to see what additional learning is occurring in our schools. To fail to do so would be unethical and would not serve to increase our understanding of education. When the hidden curriculum is studied, it is found to be elusive, always changing, existing both inside and outside of formal schooling, tied to the formal curriculum, and always in place in some setting.

Once the hidden curriculum is found, it is no longer hidden. But what is to be done with the hidden curriculum once it is found? Martin gives several suggestions:

1. It can be left alone, because once it is found, it is no longer hidden.
2. An attempt can be made to change it if the effects are undesirable.
3. An attempt can be made to abolish the setting as advanced by the deschooling movement.
4. It can be embraced openly for its positive effects.³⁰

Many contradictions and paradoxes surround this issue, and it is up to educational experts, professionals in the field, scholars, and individual consumers to decide how to approach the hidden curriculum. Because of the pervasiveness of the hidden curriculum in our schools, education will be more effective when the hidden curriculum is better understood and the issues related to it are clearer.

²⁹Kathleen Wilcox, "Ethnography as a Methodology and Its Application to the Study of Education: A Review," in *Doing the Ethnography of Schooling* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1982), p. 464.

³⁰Jane R. Martin, "What Should We Do with a Hidden Curriculum When We Find One?" *Curriculum Inquiry* 6, 2 (1976): 144-145.

Those doing inquiry along these lines are welcome to address me, and I will put them in touch with a network of others who are similarly engaged

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Jozefzoon, Eddy O. I., ed. *Coordinating Curriculum Policy and Practice: The Innovative Role of the Dutch National Institute for Curriculum Development*. Enschede, The Netherlands: National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO), 1986. 237 pp.

This work describes projects of the Dutch National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) and its role in creating and disseminating curriculum proposals and materials for use in improving the quality of education in The Netherlands. Included are four detailed papers, presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in San Francisco, April 1986, on: principles and procedures of SLO work, a case study of Junior Secondary Education, innovation in science education, and evaluation of the impact of SLO products.

Rudduck, Jean, and David Hopkins, eds. *Research as a Basis for Teaching: Readings from the Work of Lawrence Stenhouse*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann Educational Books, 1985. 133 pp

This posthumously published collection of 25 excerpts from Stenhouse's writings about research, curriculum, and teaching, taken from both published and unpublished work, is even more compelling and challenging than his last book of papers, *Authority, Education, and Emancipation* (1983). He relates the concept of *teacher-as-researcher* to the improvement of curriculum and teaching practice through strengthening teacher judgments.

Strickland, Kate, ed. *Ralph W. Tyler*. A Special Topic Edition, *Journal of Thought* 21 (Spring 1986): 1-118.

Interviews, tributes, and historical accounts highlighting Ralph Tyler's contributions to curriculum and evaluation are presented by the Society for the Study of Curriculum History. Four papers by Tyler are also included, on recollections of 50 years of curriculum work, educational measurement, the Eight Year Study, and what the curriculum field needs to learn from its history

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