

Articles

The Hidden Curriculum in Schools: Implications for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth¹

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Since the inception of public schools, curriculum has been a source of ongoing debate and disagreement. Educational bureaucrats, school board administrators, principals, vice principals, teachers, parents, community organizations, and even students weigh in on discussions about what students should learn in class, how learning is best facilitated, and how to measure and evaluate such learning. Textbooks, teaching practice, projects, homework, examinations, report cards, and the like, are the purview of the formal curriculum. However, students learn in ways that lie beyond the boundaries of the formal curriculum through what is known as the *hidden curriculum* (Jackson, 1968).

The hidden curriculum as a theoretical construct is conceptually problematic. As does the “formal” curriculum, the hidden curriculum defies definitional consensus. Nevertheless, the hidden curriculum will refer here to student learning that takes place within the perimeter of a school that is not recorded or reflected within the official curriculum.

Theorists are not unanimous about the effects of the hidden curriculum on students and on teaching practice. The phrase “the hidden curriculum” explicates its defining characteristic, namely, that it is hidden. Unlike the official curriculum, the hidden curriculum does not make reference to tangible, constituent materials and outcomes measurable through standardized procedures or established protocols. By comparison, the hidden curriculum is a concept that seems ambiguous. Some

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curricular theorists, such as Lakomski (1988) even deny its existence as a definably empirical phenomenon. Unlike Lakomski, I argue that the hidden curriculum becomes evident when seen through a critical lens, specifically one that explores the nature of power and privilege in education and harmful implications for disadvantaged students.

Informally, students learn about values and norms of their particular school culture through peer socialization and interactions with school authorities. Such learning is as important as the formal curriculum (MacDonald, 1988). The socialization of students to gender roles, work ethics, and social attitudes towards others, for example, are facets of the hidden curriculum (Henson, 1995). For educational theorist Peter McLaren (2003), curriculum represents not only programs of study, but also “the introduction to a particular form of life; [which] serves in part to prepare students for dominant and subordinate positions in the existing capitalist society” (p. 211 – 12). Curriculum as a cultural mechanism is thus hegemonic in how it serves dominant interests not through sheer repression of the underprivileged, but through social practices that are normalized over time and mask the ways in which the disadvantaged participate in their own oppression.

The hidden curriculum is thus a mechanism by which social and cultural norms are replicated and regulated. For students who are marginalized through constructs of identity such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, physical and mental ability, and sexuality, the effects of the hidden curriculum can render their school lives particularly challenging to negotiate and even to survive. In this paper, I focus on the hidden curriculum as a regulator of gender and sexual orientation in schools. Gender schemas and the concomitant assumption of heterosexuality, for instance, are enforced and reinforced, thus excluding and marginalizing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students. Gender and sexuality are thus constructs supported by hegemony and ideology. LGBTQ students transgress dominant expectations of gender and sexuality that are especially salient in schools. My examination of the hidden curriculum as a concept explores implications for LGBTQ students and their families and how exposure of the hidden curriculum can advance social justice in schools particularly in the areas of gender and sexuality diversity.

Identification and Brief History of the Hidden Curriculum

Throughout the last several decades, theorists concerned with the hidden curriculum have contributed a diversity of perspectives on the notion of unofficial learning. One such theorist was Philip Jackson. When he coined the term in 1968 (p. 33), he argued that schools are responsible for two curricula, one "official" and the other "hidden." The official curriculum, according to Jackson, places academic demands upon students while the hidden curriculum concerns the unwritten institutional demands for conformity. Jackson was not the first to theorize about the ways in which educational experiences of students reflect learning that is not planned through the administration of formal curricula. In 1918, for instance, Franklin Bobbitt proposed that students should be groomed to assume the affairs of adulthood through their educational experiences (Jackson, 1998). In Bobbitt's view, such educational experiences include those that take place out-of-school and beyond classroom lessons. His conception of the hidden curriculum implies that assorted modes of learning take place within the sphere of curriculum, including – as Jackson (1998) puts it – "in school / out of school, [and] directed / undirected" experiences (p. 8).

Similarly, John Dewey (1916) included learning experiences that are achieved in ways additional to standard school subjects. An exclusive focus on academic skills, he insisted, is narrow (p. 417). "The . . . danger," he argued, "[is] that the material of formal instruction will be merely the subject matter of the schools, isolated from the subject matter of life-experience" (p. 10).

Both Bobbitt and Dewey were educational reformists who proposed that previously-established educational emphasis on rote learning and object lessons did not reflect the complexities and needs of modern life (Klicbard, 1975). Even though early curricular theorists did not articulate out-of-school / undirected learning as "hidden," they share with Jackson a concern for the need to expand the notion of student learning beyond formalized curricula. Such a perspective, grounded in humanism, calls attention to – in Jackson's (1998) words – a "curriculum of life" (p. 8).

To include out-of-school experiences within the domain of education seems to place greater responsibility to instill good citizenship and moral character in students on school administration and teachers than on parents. Bobbitt, Dewey, and other curricular theorists of the early 1900s,

advocated educational reforms that addressed the needs of society at that time. Outcomes of such broadly-defined notions of curriculum were intended to remedy the deficiencies of society, to which individual parents usually could not attend. Hence, reformists such as Bobbitt and Dewey cast their focus upon positive outcomes of learning. In their view, the development of students into productive citizens of democratic societies is one such positive outcome. By investing in the educational needs and experiences of students, it was argued that society would ultimately benefit from molding students into capable citizens who would take up the democratically-responsible task of participating in all aspects of society. Similar arguments are currently made in support of 'social responsibility', a widely used phrase among today's educators and administrators.

An educational paradigm that emphasizes social, civil, and ethical concerns and attitudes as important contributions to society, in addition to academic knowledge and skills, has waxed and waned throughout the twentieth century (Cuban, 1990; Lewis, et al., 1995; Battistich, et al., 1999). Paradigmatic shifts aside, it was curriculum theorists of the 1960s who drew attention away from positive aspects of curriculum reform and educational experience and onto negative consequences of school attendance (Jackson, 1968). Evidently, educational institutions were not exempt from the criticism of political activists during a decade rife with civil revolt.

For educational theorists such as Michael Apple (1975), schools reflect and perpetuate dominant societal ideologies "implicitly but effectively" (p. 96) through the hidden curriculum. One consequence is that students tend to become quiescent within school environments which exhibit macro-economic relations analogous to those between employers and workers (Apple, 1996) and which reproduce and reinforce social stratification along lines of gender (Best, 1983), class (Freire, 1968), and racialized category (Anyon, 1988).

The implication of political theorists such as Apple is that the hidden curriculum is comprised of unofficial expectations, unofficial learning outcomes, and / or implicit messages as products of school administrators and teachers. However, students themselves, as well as school officials, contribute to the hidden curriculum. Quiescence to dominant interests is not merely submission, but a complex outcome of power relations that channel particular issues to be addressed and shape the

needs of the relatively powerless (Gaventa, 1980, Lukes, 2005). "Generalized discontent [may be] present," Gaventa observes, "but lies hidden and contained" (p. 252). In the case of schools, the hidden curriculum on gender and sexuality thus has increasingly gained prominence in public discourse fueled by challenge from educational critics such as McLaren (2003), Apple (1996), and Pinar (1995), as well as from students who do not conform to normalized constructs of gender and sexuality.

The notion that both students and educators "hide" an unofficial curriculum raises a flashpoint of debate, namely, whether the hidden curriculum is motivated by intent. In the next section, I explore this issue and then turn attention to research on sexuality in schools as a case in point.

The Issue of Intent

Portelli (1993) argues that, "something does not necessarily need to be hidden intentionally in order to be a hidden curriculum" (p. 349). Conversely, Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1991) lists synonyms for the word, "hidden" such as "concealed," "unexplained," and "undisclosed." These are all action words. To conceal, to not explain, or to not disclose suggests that choices are made or not made. It is significant that these terms *imply* intent, unlike closely related words such as "unknown," "unspecified," and "unacknowledged." The negative effects of schooling discussed by Apple (1975) and Pinar (1995), among others, are not necessarily the result of unfortunate circumstances, accidents, unforeseen complications of learning environments, or lack of awareness among teachers and administrators.

Such factors can and do result in unpleasant outcomes for students. Sometimes, teachers ignore their students and deny their requests; they may even scold a student, usually when she or he has violated the expectations of appropriate classroom behaviour rather than when she or he has failed to demonstrate certain academic skills (Jackson, 1968). Sometimes students may feel disappointed because of a failing grade or anxious or angry for having to patiently wait their turn. Such everyday experiences in the lives of students might be painful, tedious, or difficult to tolerate but to describe them as harmful may be overstating the matter, at least in most situations.

Harm, as I mean it, refers to injury or damage to a student's self-concept, pride, or self-esteem, the effects of which can be substantial and long-term. The very qualifiers "substantial" and "long-term" are inter-

pretive and thus provide fodder for quibbles. Rather than spark a semantic debate about those terms, I instead conceptualize the term “harm” in contrast to more common circumstances of “pain.” Whereas pain can result from particular incidents, harm suggests injury sustained by some students as an effect of social and political relations of a school culture and organization. The former suggests the idiosyncratic; the latter suggests the systemic. Both are linked to relations of power.

Describing harm as I have done assists in differentiating systemic subjugation from everyday incidents that may inspire anger, frustration, sadness, or embarrassment for a student. However, such a description does not shed light on a more fundamental controversy about the hidden curriculum, namely, whether its effects – both positive and negative – are the outcome of intentional decisions of, and actions taken by, school administrators and teachers. A central problem with the question, “Are the effects of the hidden curriculum intentional?” is the very asking of it. Its mere articulation is potentially inflammatory to educators who love to teach and who strive to enable their young charges to think critically, communicate effectively, and adopt practices of good citizenship.²

Apart from potentially defensive reactions from some teachers and school administrators, harm, as I have described above, can and does result from school experiences. MacDonald and Colberg MacDonald (1988) provide commentary on the hidden curriculum that hints at potential and intentional harm of students. In their view, the hidden curriculum reflects the dominant value orientation evident in the “rules and policies, the management techniques in classrooms, and the building of attitudes through the activities and relationships of the school” (p. 483).

Similarly, Apple (1979) describes the hidden curriculum as, “the tacit teaching to students of norms, values, and dispositions that goes on simply by their living in and coping with the institutional expectations and routines of schools” (p. 14). The hidden curriculum is a venue through which relations of power are exercised. The phrase “tacit teaching” is stronger language than the comparatively benign “undirected” or “out-of-school” experiences to which Bobbitt and Dewey focused their attention. If Apple’s description indicates a somewhat insidious or pernicious side of education, Pinar (1995) explicates the point in his claim that, “the hidden curriculum is the ideological and subliminal message presented within the overt curriculum . . .” (p. 27). Pinar does not mince words; his argument that ideology and subliminal messages are “presented” implies

that particular sorts of messages are covertly but intentionally disseminated to students. To conceptualize power as one-directional, however, considers neither how discourse shapes the ways in which some issues and participants are brought into decision-making processes while others are not; nor how those outside of the decision-making process acquiesce to oppression (Gaventa, 1980; Lukes, 2005).

Power, thus, is multi-dimensional. In addition and specific to schools, positing the actions taken by school administrators and teachers through power as either intentional or unintentional sets up a false dichotomy. Feasibly, the dissemination of certain messages may be intended but the consequences of those messages may be unintended. Empirical verification of intentions is one of the thorny controversies of the hidden curriculum. Lakomski (1988) argues that intentions cannot be reliably observed; they can only be attributed. The problem, as Lakomski sees it, is that connecting intentions correctly with particular behaviours is inferential rather than observable.

Lakomski seems to address only methodological issues, in which case, she may be correct in her discussion about the problematic nature of intentions that she believes underlie the hidden curriculum. However, to focus on the hidden curriculum only as methodologically confused is to ignore the ways in which informal learning is also conceptual in addition to empirical. Gordon (1988) provides a rebuttal to Lakomski's dismissal of the hidden curriculum by arguing that, "she fails to prove her case that intentions are problematic, but at best shows that identifying them is difficult" (p. 467). In spite of the contributions to the notion of the hidden curriculum provided by Lakomski (1988) and Gordon (1988), focus on the intended / unintended dichotomy may be a red herring. Theoretical discussions and conceptual clarifications are academically interesting and may contribute to understandings of the development of school culture. However, as far as school practice is concerned, such discussions may be politically toothless if one's goal is to foster social justice in educational settings.

Focusing on the effects of the hidden curriculum and contextualizing them within a context of power relations, rather than on its conceptual distinctions, may illuminate preventions and remediations of the harm that some students, such as LGBTQ ones, incur within school environments.

Sexuality Education in Schools

Sex education reflects a history since the nineteenth century that is rife with controversy, rancor, and political extremes (Rury, 1992).³ In its formal curricular incarnation, sex education tends to focus on the mechanics of sex and related health issues (Haffner, 1992; Epstein and Johnson, 1994). My specific interest is not on what is actually taught but rather on what is typically left out of sex education curricula. Highlighting issues that are usually excluded from curriculum brings into focus the ways in which assumptions, stereotypes, and prejudices tend to be reflected covertly in formal sex education curricula (Sapon-Shevin and Goodman, 1992). It is significant that such teaching is typically labeled as "sex education" rather than as "sexuality education." Whereas the former evokes usual notions about heterosexual sexuality and invalidates homosexuality through silence or denigration, the latter implies acknowledgement of the plurality of human sexuality.

Sexuality is a way of being in the world, an identity and positionality rather than merely a series of socially acceptable versus unacceptable acts. Whether or not such plurality is discussed openly in the context of 'sex education' classes is doubtful in most classes (Shurberg Klein, 1992). Current discourse on 'diversity' thus is limited to that which is deemed the least politically volatile, thereby excluding gender and sexual orientation diversity. A focus on topics that are left out of sex education curricula result from the hidden curriculum, in which case the "intentions" debate (discussed earlier) would again come to the fore.

The issue of teaching and learning about sexuality has recently inspired some rather contentious debates in educational practice. Educational critics such as McKay (1998) and Sears (1992) each advocate broadening classroom discussion to sexuality as diverse experiences that reflect complex social and health issues. McKay and Sears also encourage sex educators to recognize their audience as heterogeneous regarding gender and sexuality.

For several decades, feminist researchers have described the ways in which girls and boys tend to be socialized to heterosexuality through the promotion of usual gender scripts of femininity for girls and masculinity for boys (Adams, 1997). Socialization experiences in schools tend to perpetuate these gendered scripts (McKay, 1998; Sapon-Shevin and Goodman, 1992). Such scripts have strong influence upon one's gender identity and expression (Devor, 1989), interpersonal relationships

including spouse and family (VanEvery, 1996), and choices concerning work and career (Adams, 1997).

Similarly, the work of a minority of educators, including some feminists, highlights the ways in which heterosexuality is covertly (Epstein and Johnson, 1994; Redman, 1994) and overtly (McKay, 1998) normalized and regulated in society, including schools. Heterosexism refers to the presumption of heterosexuality that is encoded in language, in daily interactions among people, and in institutional policies and practices (Epstein and Johnson, 1994). In this sense, heterosexuality is unambiguous, ubiquitous, and *appears* as a “natural” and “normal” state. The very categories of “natural” and “normal” are constituted from political, social, and historical conditions and reinforced through social and institutional norms. Whereas heterosexism tends to be silent, unmarked and presumed, homophobia, according to Epstein and Johnson, refers to, “active and explicit attacks on lesbians and gays, often fuelled by unacknowledged motives and / or panic” (p. 197).⁴ Pervasive attitudes that gays and lesbians should keep their sexuality and sexual orientation identity a private matter and away from public visibility arise from heterosexist assumptions and homophobic attitudes (Adams, 1997; Epstein and Johnson, 1994). The legalization of same-sex marriage in Canada in 2005 after many years of legislative struggle was a major step towards acquiring legal equality of lesbians and gays with the heterosexual majority. However, the degree to which such measures enhance social equality remains to be seen.

Legal measures that legitimize gay or lesbian relationships are recent and the ripples are yet to be felt in all realms of Canadian society. Meanwhile, schools remain sites of salient heteronormativity. It is within schools that heterosexual pairings are encouraged and validated, and where discussion about sexuality tends to be limited to a heterosexual context of sexual mechanics and sexuality transmitted diseases. Schools are also venues where gay and lesbian couples are covertly excluded from school social functions such as dances and where curricular resources for LGBTQ students, and those interested in LGBT-related issues, are usually nonexistent (Epstein and Johnson, 1994). The implicit “rule” that students should be heterosexual and are to conduct themselves as such in school environments becomes glaringly obvious when some students adopt expressions of gender non-conformity or “come out” as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Other students tend to harass such non-

conforming students (O'Connor, 1994; Gibson, 1994) while teachers and administrators often marginalize and ignore them (Massachusetts Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth, 1994). In any case, it is these students, rather than systemic exclusion, that are typically the focus of what is considered to be the problem and the source of amelioration.

Significantly, it is the very negative reactions to students who do not conform to dominant schemas of gender and sexuality that undermine the pervasive assumption of heterosexuality as "natural" and "normal." The continual bolstering of heterosexuality through a variety of regulatory mechanisms belies its status as natural and normal. Notwithstanding Canada's recent revision of the Marriage Act that specifies "two persons" rather than "one man and one woman," most legal systems of the world reward heterosexual marriage, deny equal rights to gay and lesbians, and even criminalize homosexuality. Powerful also are religious doctrines that condemn and demonize homosexuality, and social conventions that impair the social visibility of gays and lesbians. In short, heterosexuality is an institution (Rich, 1993), though rarely acknowledged as such, which is strengthened by legal, religious, and social privilege.

The educational realm is not exempt from such explicit and implicit social dynamics. It is precisely the *hegemony* of heterosexuality, rather than heterosexuality itself, that is the concern of many social activists including those in education. Organizing human relations along lines of (hetero)sexuality is a significant, though not impervious, force. Such relations are fostered in ways that are often unintended, which clearly indicates the degree to which heteronormativity is enacted in society and in schools. Lack of intent, however, does not curb the consequent harm that some students sustain.

Consider, for example, a teacher's lack of awareness about gay and lesbian history. Lacking such knowledge may result in the unintentional exclusion of gay and lesbian history from discussions about Nazism during World War II. It is rarely mentioned in classroom discussions that gays and lesbians were a group targeted for persecution along with Jews, Gypsies, among others (Plant, 1987). In the arts and humanities, teachers may not be aware that some key writers and artists such as James Baldwin, Cole Porter, Walt Whitman, Michelangelo, Tennessee Williams, Gore Vidal, Virginia Woolf, E.M. Forster, Allen Ginsberg, Gertrude

Stein, Timothy Findlay, and Leonardo de Vinci, were homosexual. Thus, gay and lesbian history, unlike the histories of other targeted groups, has two unique qualities. One is that gay and lesbian history is usually taken to be non-existent, and therefore not "taken" at all. The other is that discussion about gay and lesbian history in classrooms is rife with stigmatization.

Teachers are often afraid of being perceived as, or being out as, gay or lesbian because of potential job loss or harassment (Epstein and Johnson, 1994).⁵ Regardless of such consequences, acquiescence to prevailing norms contributes to social invisibility of gays and lesbians and deters gender and sexual orientation diversity. Cultures in schools reflect larger society. In the absence of gender and sexual orientation diversity, students are left to contend with the hegemony of heterosexuality and dominant scripts of gender. School cultures of heterosexuality, to the exclusion of other positionalities, remain entrenched. In addition, homophobic bullying continues to go unchallenged even as generic safe schools programs and policies proliferate (Walton, 2004).

Within curriculum, even when teachers are aware of gay and lesbian history, as most are in the case of Oscar Wilde, they will tend to avoid and disregard discussion of how sexuality informs their work (McLaren, 1995). Gay and lesbian historical invisibility in education is one facet of a general climate of gay and lesbian invisibility in society. LGBTQ youth, typically alienated from school culture, tend to be doubly marginalized as a result of such curricular blinders.

Perpetrating harm based on unacknowledged assumptions or lack of information is to be expected though by no means excused; all individuals incorporate ways of thinking and acting that are normalized through social norms, values, and expectations. On the other hand, some actions and decisions taken by teachers and school administrators extend privileges to (ostensibly) straight students at the expense of LGBTQ students (Uribe and Harbeck, 1992). For example, it is not uncommon for teachers and / or school administrators to fail to intervene in cases of harassment and bullying of students who are presumed to be, or identify as, gay and lesbian.

It is usual that human sexuality is not represented as diverse and to not address issues related to such diversity. It is commonplace in schools to deny equality of opportunity for visibility, social integration, and access to resources for LGBTQ students. It is frequent that student-led

Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and plays that feature gay or lesbian issues and characters are disallowed.⁶

It is occasional that books that present diversity of family configurations, including those with GLBT members, are prohibited from school classrooms, famously exemplified by the Surrey School District in British Columbia. In 1997, trustees in that district banned from use in classrooms three picture books that feature same-sex parents among other configurations of family, thus denying students with age appropriate educational resources on LGBTQ families. In 2005, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that religious imperatives must not overrule curriculum that reflects diversity of communities and that the Surrey board must "reconsider" their decision (Carter, 2004). In 2005, the Board also cancelled performances of *The Laramie Project*, a play based on the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay college student from Laramie Wyoming.

Conservative and religious organizations championed the actions of the Surrey School Board. The opinion that schools are not appropriate venues for discussion about (homo)sexuality is widespread. Many people, some educators included, believe that students, especially those in elementary school, are "innocent" and therefore are unaware of the existence of gays and lesbians much less of homosexuality (Epstein and Johnson, 1994). Documentary films such as *It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues In School* (Chasnoff and Cohen, 1996) indicate otherwise. In the film, young children talk about their awareness that some people are "gay." According to the filmmakers, such awareness is in spite of lack of discussion on the topic in the classroom. Most children probably do not (nor should they) have an awareness of specific sexual activities, regardless of whether they are classified as "homo" or "hetero." However, most children have probably heard the words "gay" and "lesbian" from television and print media. In the schoolyard, at home, and in the media, pejorative descriptors are heard routinely, such as "homo," "fag," "dyke," and "queer." Sexuality education resources such as *It's Elementary* specifically address this form of violence in order to facilitate safer school environments for all students.

Other districts have taken measures to address homophobia in schools, particularly in the areas of curriculum and policy. The Toronto District School Board, for instance, implemented the *Triangle Program*, which is designed to meet the social and educational needs of LGBT

youth. It is the only such program in Canada (Toronto District School Board, 2003). The Greater Victoria School District (GVSD, 2005) has recently adopted policy and education on LGBT issues and safety in the district through an advisory committee, which includes representatives from the district and the wider community. At the forefront of advocacy for LGBT friendly schools, the Gay and Lesbian Educators of British Columbia (GALE BC, 2005), provides educational resources for educators, parents, and students.

Policy and curriculum are strategic areas to focus efforts to promote social justice in schools. The *Triangle Program*, too, has key benefits, specifically in creating safer learning environments for LGBT students who otherwise would likely have dropped out of school. However, the contradiction is that these students are separated from the larger Toronto student body and thus, diversity is compromised and the hidden curriculum, at least as it regulates gender and sexual orientation diversity, remains in tact.

The initiatives outlined here are controversial. Whether in curriculum or policy, measures to represent LGBT people in educational contexts inspires bigotry in the guise of “concern.” Many conservative parents, educational activists, and religious organizations endorse, for instance, “keeping homosexuality out of schools” for the good of all students. Such activism tends to arise from beliefs in emotional dysfunction, spiritual poverty, and / or mental illness as etiologies of homosexuality (Haldeman, 1991; Herman, 1997), which contrast research that demonstrates otherwise (Gonsiorek, 1991). Furthermore, negative perceptions of homosexuality – even ones in the guise of “science” – are plagued by dogma, negative stereotypes, and bigotry. Nevertheless, many parents, teachers, and school administrators continue to cling to such empirically unfounded beliefs.

It seems paradoxical that, on one hand, LGBTQ students tend to be marginalized and harassed in school, and, on the other hand, gay and lesbian activists have made gains in social and legal equality with heterosexuals. Rates of alienation, depression, and suicidal ideation of LGBTQ students are disproportionate to those of their straight counterparts (Hershberger and D’Augelli, 1995). However, the groundswell of social movements and backlash is fueled by power. In spite of achievements in legal equality of lesbians and gays with straights, homosexuality continues to be stigmatized in many arenas of public life, including schools.

Moreover, a focus on intent is somewhat beside the point and certainly does not contribute to equity and social justice for LGBTQ students. Harm is manifest regardless of intent.

Towards Exposure

One of the problems with the hidden curriculum, as I have pointed out, is the very word "hidden." It provokes debates about whether aspects of informal curricula are intended or not intended. Such debates are useful for illuminating the ways in which some agendas are indeed hidden from overt articulation for particular political reasons but they can also arrest movement beyond discussion. Rather than focusing on whether certain aspects of informal curriculum are deliberately hidden from students, it seems more critical to promote measures to remedy systemic harm of school environments.

Haffner (1992) and Portelli (1993) each advocate exposure of the hidden curriculum. It is difficult to imagine a situation where there are no hidden agendas and no unwritten rules of conduct particularly concerning sexuality and gender roles. Exposure is meant as relative rather than as all-or-nothing legalism. Ironically, anti-gay measures such as banning books that feature gay and lesbian characters and prohibiting GSAs expose previously hidden agendas of perpetuating heteronormativity at the expense of LGBTQ students, those with gay or lesbian family members, and those who ally themselves with gays and lesbians at their schools. Activists who have supported anti-LGBTQ measures in schools have perhaps unwittingly accelerated the work of other activists who promote equity and social justice for all students including those who need or would like access to LGBTQ-positive resources, regardless of the reason.

The very access or denial of resources for LGBTQ students, as well as for their supporters, leads to a more fundamental question, namely, who has the right to determine how children will be educated and by what means? No single group, whether educators, parents, or students, can claim exclusive authority on this issue. Theoretically, all citizens of democratic societies can participate in the functioning of educational institutions, particularly publicly-funded ones. The world of grade school education is thus contested ground indeed. Nevertheless, the availability of such resources in schools does not prevent parents to

inculcate, as they deem appropriate, particular values to their children. Availability also does not “expose” their children to homosexuality, as some parents fear, nor does it prevent parents from teaching particular values and norms to their children. Although members of some parents’ groups accuse gay and lesbian educational activists of promoting such a “hidden” agenda, it is, in fact, heteronormativity that tends to be “hidden” within most school cultures and school policies.

Many parents and educators, especially those with conservative religious beliefs, have lobbied school boards to reform education to reflect the “three Rs” (Battistich et al., 1999). This approach, which emphasizes only academic skills and knowledge, demonstrates a limited understanding of the reality of schools, particularly regarding the hidden curriculum. In spite of romanticized notions, schooling has never been *only* about academics (Battistich et al., 1999). Many such recent educational reformists presume that the three Rs is a traditional and successful approach that has since been buried under agendas of other educational activists.

The moral and political battle over sexuality education – regarding formal and informal curriculum – is not one in which students are mere passive victims of the adult establishment. Many students challenge discriminatory school policies and resist oppressive school cultures. Examples of such student activism against school authority and cultural codes are many. Students in Canada and the United States, for instance, have formed GSAs even when prohibited by their school district from doing so. Some gay and lesbian students have taken same-sex partners to school proms, as Marc Hall did in 2002 after winning a lawsuit against his school board for refusing his request to bring his male partner as his prom date. Students such as Jamie Nabozny (Boland, 1996), Azmi Jubran (Matas, 2002), and David Knight (Malarek, 2002) have each filed lawsuits against teachers, school administrators, and school boards for not providing adequate protections against homophobic harassment and violence.

These students and others have used personal, social, and legal resources to challenge heteronormativity and homophobic violence in schools to make school cultures more inclusive and safer, particularly concerning LGBTQ students and families. These students have contrib-

uted to exposure of the hidden curriculum though they may not describe their actions as doing so.

Resistance among students against gender and sexuality norms that are promoted and regulated in schools through the hidden curriculum need not be overt. Hebdige (1979) describes hegemony not at a constant but rather as a moving equilibrium, a set of relational forces that must be “won, reproduced, sustained” (p. 16). Although he was referring to youth culture in general rather than specifically to LGBTQ students, Hebdige’s conception of hegemony describes well the relational dynamics between school officials and students concerning “hidden” curricula that perpetuate and reinforce unwritten values, norms, and rules of a school to which students are expected to comply.

When students confound heteronormativity and homophobia in schools, they expose particular dimensions of the hidden curriculum. Similarly – and paradoxically – when school authorities and parents attempt to reinforce values and norms of dominant paradigms of gender, sexuality, and family through educational policy and curriculum at the exclusion of some students, they, too, expose the hidden curriculum. Exposing and confronting these dimensions of the hidden curriculum promotes social justice for LGBTQ students and their supporters through policies and cultures of caring, respect, equity, and safety in schools. Indeed, fostering such cultures is ethically necessary and the responsibility of educators and administrators for the benefit of all students.

Endnotes

1. The author would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities for generous support of his doctoral research.
2. It is not the case that potentially inflammatory questions should not be asked. Rather, the asking of such questions needs to be done strategically rather than haphazardly.
3. In some ways, the history of sex education reflects similar controversies as other fields of study in schools. Within science, for example, the theory of evolution continues to inspire passionate debates about the origins of material and human existence that are, at times, underscored by religious beliefs if not fervor.
4. I would argue that homophobia is a much more complex phenomena than Epstein and Johnson (1994) indicate. It can be active and explicit but it can

Alternate Routes

also be covert and implicit and therefore more insidious and pervasive than overt attacks.

5. Epstein and Johnson (1994) point out that most gay and lesbian teachers are “paranoid” (p. 224) about being “outed” for fear of losing their jobs. I would add that *all* teachers, not just gay and lesbian ones, have the same concern. (The film, *It’s Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues In School* (Chasnoff and Cohen, 1996) explores the ways in which straight teachers are comparatively exempt from such anxieties).

6. GSAs are school-based organizations that promote education on, and provide support for, gay and lesbian students, straight allies, and other students (such as those who are transgender and self-defined as queer).

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