The Hidden Curriculum
Re-examined

Linda L. Bain

The hidden curriculum consists of implicit values taught and learned through the process of schooling. The first section of this paper describes theoretical and methodological approaches to research in this area, drawing examples from general education literature. The second section reviews research related to the hidden curriculum in physical education. The final section proposes a model for feminist analysis of the hidden curriculum in sport and physical education.

The term "hidden curriculum" has been used extensively in educational literature since the early 1970s to refer to "what is taught to students by the institutional regularities, by the routines and rituals of teacher/student lives" (Weis, 1982, p. 3). Some time ago I discussed the hidden curriculum in physical education in Quest 24 (Bain, 1975). Now, a decade later, it seems appropriate to re-examine the topic in light of the research completed since that time.

Interest in the hidden curriculum provided much of the early impetus for examining the lived culture in schools and for use of qualitative research methodologies in educational research. A review of the theoretical bases for this research may shed light not only on the hidden curriculum but also on theoretical issues related to qualitative research. Although the hidden curriculum in physical education has received only limited attention, the research completed has extended our knowledge of the implicit values communicated by physical education programs.

Approaches to the Study of the Hidden Curriculum

Four approaches to the study of the hidden curriculum can be identified in general education literature. This review will rely primarily upon American authors, but it is important to note that they were influenced by European social theory in general and British sociology of education in particular. Although many researchers can be identified within each of the four approaches, Table 1 identifies one representative work that exemplifies each of the approaches being described.

Phillip Jackson (1966, 1968) conducted some of the earliest research on the topic and popularized the term "hidden curriculum." Jackson conducted intensive observations of elementary school classrooms and noted that the day-to-day conduct of schooling seemed to be a powerful mechanism for transmitting values and beliefs to children. He describes

About the Author: Linda L. Bain is with the Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Houston, TX 77004.
Table 1
Approaches to the Study of the Hidden Curriculum

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those classrooms as characterized by crowds (the homogenous grouping of students), power (the authority of the teacher and the powerlessness of students), and praise (a teacher-controlled system of evaluation). He suggests that students learn patience, acceptance of impersonal prescriptive authority, and distinctions between work and play. Students also learn to conform to institutional expectations but to maneuver in this setting by seeking privilege through "apple polishing" and by hiding behaviors that might displease those in authority. Jackson’s work could best be described as atheoretical in that he described the events in classrooms without attempting to relate those descriptions to a theory about schooling and society. While such work clearly has limitations, it served an important role in raising the issue of the impact of the hidden curriculum. Debate ensued about whether these routines and rituals of schooling were functional or dysfunctional, harmful or harmless.

Some early examinations of the effects of the hidden curriculum were based upon a functionalist perspective which examined how the school prepares students for effective participation in adult society. Robert Dreeben’s (1968) analysis of what is learned in schools suggests that the hidden curriculum is an effective mechanism for teaching students essential norms. Specifically he suggests that students learn the norms of independence, achievement, universalism, and specificity. That is, students learn to work independently and to accept responsibility for competing against a standard of excellence. Children also learn to accept that in public life, in contrast to family life, one is treated by others as a member of a category (universalism) and that the scope of one person’s interest in another is confined to a narrow range specific to the purpose of the interaction (specificity). This permits students to distinguish between persons and their social positions, a capacity Dreeben describes as crucially important in occupational and political life. He suggests that schooling, occupation, and politics are reasonably well integrated and that schools contribute to the creation of capacities required by the political economic system.

Not everyone who examines the hidden curriculum sees it as beneficial to students. Critics claim that the schools contribute to the maintenance of political and economic systems of domination, exploitation, and inequality and that the hidden curriculum is a central aspect of this process. Although several writers have proposed such a correspondence between
school and society, the most complete analysis was proposed by Bowles and Gintis (1976) in *Schooling in Capitalist America*. They posit that through the day-to-day regularities of schools, students learn social class definitions, the discipline of the workplace, the legitimacy of hierarchical arrangements and loss of control over their own work. The correspondence theory suggests that "the hierarchically structured patterns of values, norms, and skills that characterize the work force and the dynamics of class interaction under capitalism are mirrored in the social dynamics of the daily classroom" (Giroux, 1981a, p. 6).

It should be noted that both the functionalist and the correspondence analyses of the relationship between schooling and society assume that certain meanings and values are taught by schools without examining directly the meanings held by teachers and students. Both also view the school as functioning to maintain society but they differ in their judgment as to whether such a society is fundamentally just or unjust.

The most recent work on the hidden curriculum builds upon the neo-Marxist analyses of the correspondence theorists, but rejects both their determinism and their treatment of the school as a "black box" (Apple, 1979, 1982; Giroux, 1981a, 1981b). Apple (1982, p. 14) argues that "schools are not 'merely' institutions of reproduction, institutions where the overt and covert knowledge that is taught inexorably molds students into passive beings who are able and eager to fit into an unequal society." He suggests that "student reinterpretation, at best only partial acceptance, and often outright rejection of the planned and unplanned meanings of schools, are more likely." For this reason, schools contain the potential for both reproduction and transformation of society. To understand the hidden curriculum one must study the lived culture of the school and analyze its relationship to the structure of the larger society. Such research assumes that knowledge is socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and begins with an analysis of meaning that utilizes ethnographic and phenomenological studies. However, this analysis of meaning is combined with an analysis of ideology and reproduction (Apple, 1978). The recent work edited by Apple and Weis (1983) contains several examples of research employing this analysis of both meaning and ideology. Other important examples are Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour* (1977), a study of working-class boys in a comprehensive secondary school in England, and Robert Everhart's (1983) *Reading, Writing and Resistance*, a study of an American junior high school.

The steps involved in conducting research on schooling following this critical theory model are outlined below. In contrast to the positivist approach which assumes research to be value-free, this perspective sees all knowledge including research as socially constructed and therefore begins with a clarification of the standpoint of the researcher. Steps 2 and 3 take the researcher inside the "black box" of the school to observe behavior and to discover its meaning to teachers and students. This microanalysis is followed by a macroanalysis of the relationship of the lived culture to the reproduction or transformation of class, race, and gender relations. Because the researcher is not assumed to be value-free but instead a politically committed person, the final step in the process is the identification of actions which might assist in the transformation of schools and society, an approach sometimes called emancipatory or radical pedagogy (Giroux, 1981a, 1981b). The five steps in the implementation of a critical theory approach are these:

1. Identification of the standpoint of the researcher;
2. Description of patterns of behavior;
3. Analysis of the participants' social construction of meanings;
4. Analysis of ideology and social relations;
5. Identification of action to assist transformation.
Research on the Hidden Curriculum in Physical Education

While little if any of the research on the hidden curriculum in physical education has employed the approach just described, the steps outlined in that model serve as a useful way to organize the review of the research. Almost all studies of the hidden curriculum in physical education have assumed the positivist stance of value-free research and therefore have not made the researcher’s standpoint explicit. Most of this work seems to be either atheoretical or based upon a liberal functionalist perspective which endorses the basic justice of a meritocratic society but calls for reforms to guarantee equal opportunity for all. A few scholars have made explicitly critical analyses of sport in society (Boutilier & San Giovanni, 1983; Gruneau, 1975; Hargreaves, 1982) but they have not included analysis of pedagogical process in sport and physical education.

Some of the work on the hidden curriculum in physical education can best be characterized as descriptions of patterns of behavior fitting step 2 of the model. My studies of secondary physical education classes in Chicago (Bain, 1975, 1976) and of physical education classes and athletic team practices in Houston (Bain, 1978) used systematic observation to describe regularities of teacher behavior and class organization which communicated values and norms to students. Male and female classes were compared but no attempt was made to examine the meanings that teachers and students attached to these routines nor to examine their relationship to social theory. The research indicated there are patterns of behavior in physical education classes that can be interpreted as emphasizing orderliness, achievement, universalism, specificity, autonomy, and privacy, and that differences exist between the experiences of male and female students, urban and suburban students, and athletes and physical education students.

Recent work which examines the causes and effects of teacher expectations in teaching and coaching performs a similar function of describing patterns of behavior (Martinek, Crowe, & Rejeski, 1982). Although this work does not specifically address the hidden curriculum, it has considerable relevance. In general the research on teacher expectations in physical education indicates that teachers’ perceptions of students are influenced by gender, appearance, and perceived effort, and that these expectations influence the interactions between teacher and student in a way that is consistent with the teacher’s expectations (Martinek, 1983).

The second set of research studies on the hidden curriculum in physical education are those which have attempted not only to describe behavior but to examine the meanings that participants attach to those experiences. These studies have employed ethnographic and phenomenological research methodologies. Tindall (1975) conducted a participant observation study of physical education classes and a community basketball program. His analysis indicated that the game of basketball was experienced as a lesson in proper personal behavior. The premise underlying the game, that individuals ought to and do control other individuals, was accepted by most students but rejected by those for whom it conflicted with their native American culture.

Wang (1977) conducted a participant observation study of a fifth grade physical education class. She discovered a teacher-sponsored curriculum and a separate, contradictory student-imposed curriculum. The teacher-sponsored curriculum promoted an ideal of integrated, democratic living in which rules of individual worth were tempered with emphasis upon cooperation, equality, and social responsibility. The student-imposed curriculum revealed patterns of discrimination based on gender, race, social class, personality, and skills. Skillful sport performance had a property-like nature in the student society. Wang
suggests that a more active instruction in skills might be the most effective way to counter discrimination.

Kollen (1981, 1983) conducted a phenomenological inquiry into the perceptions of 20 high school seniors regarding their physical education classes. Based on her interviews, she concluded that the physical education environment is perceived as sterile (stressing conformity) and unsafe (characterized by embarrassment and humiliation). Students respond to the environment by "withholding something of themselves through minimal compliance, lack of involvement, manipulation of the teacher, false enthusiasm, rebellion, leaving, failing class, isolation or giving up" (Kollen, 1983, p. 87). Kollen suggests that the movement standard in physical education is masculine-athletic-competitive and that it creates a fragmented rather than an integrated movement experience.

Griffin (1983) observed sixth and seventh grade gymnastics classes and found that students' behavior revealed patterns of differentiation based on sex. Serious participation in specific gymnastics events was governed by perceived sex appropriateness of the event. Boys participated in "girl appropriate" events either frivolously or reluctantly; girls' participation in "boy appropriate" events was exploratory or reluctant. Boys limited the girls' opportunity to learn by hassling them, and limited their own opportunity to learn by clowning. Girls did not limit boys' opportunity to learn but spent most of their time trying to ignore boys or separate themselves from them. Students segregated themselves by sex and reinforced that segregation by sex differentiated participation and interactions.

These ethnographic studies which address the social construction of meanings in the physical education setting reflect an important step forward in the research. They have extended our understanding of the hidden curriculum in those settings and have suggested aspects of social relations such as gender which may have relevance for examining that hidden curriculum. However, they have not attempted a systematic analysis of the relationships of the lived culture of sport and physical education to social structure and ideologies. Apple (1978, p. 500) suggests that such omission may in fact lend support to the existing social order: "Without the overt recognition of the subtle connections between ideology and meaning, research that is limited to a description of meaning could itself be considered an aspect of reproduction." For this reason, physical educators interested in the hidden curriculum need to proceed to the final steps of the model, analysis of ideology and determination of action. The final section of this paper will address this possibility.

Feminist Analysis of the Hidden Curriculum in Physical Education

The fundamental goal of research on the hidden curriculum is not only to understand the experience of schooling but also to comprehend the relationship between schooling and society. We live in a patriarchal society in which the maintenance of gender roles supplies society with the most basic form of hierarchical social organization and order (Eisenstein, 1981). Patriarchal power results in sexual division of labor and a division between the public (male) and private (female) domains of life. The critical component of patriarchal ideology is the transformation of the biological role of woman as childbearer into the political role of woman as childrearer. The assignment of motherhood as the primary occupation of women in society has functioned to maintain and to legitimate the political and economic inequities in patriarchal societies (Firestone, 1970).

Patriarchy interacts with the economic mode of society, but is a relatively autonomous system operating alongside the economic system not derived from it. Patriarchy
has thrived in feudalist, capitalist, and socialist societies. Nevertheless, to understand the operation of patriarchy in a particular society one must examine it in relation to the structure of that society. This analysis will focus upon patriarchy and sexism in the United States. It should be noted that while this analysis focuses upon sexism, it is recognized that the efforts of sexism interact with those of racism and class. The concentration upon sexism is not intended to diminish the importance of either race or class.

American society can be characterized as a capitalist society based on an ideology that has been identified as liberal because of its emphasis upon the values of independence, individualism, and equality of opportunity. Jaggar and Struh (1978) have identified four approaches to feminism in America. Most widespread is a liberal feminism which endorses the basic principles of the existing society and seeks to ensure that the doctrine of equal opportunity is extended to include women. The assumption is that if women are allowed equal access to education, employment, and political office, the present inequities of status will disappear. The other three forms of feminism that Jaggar and Struh identify (Marxist feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism) assume that basic structural changes in society are needed in order to eliminate patriarchy and the oppression of women, although they differ on the kind of changes needed.

Most feminists, regardless of category, would concur that the system of patriarchy and sexism is maintained both by force (laws and practices that discriminate against women) and by ideology (beliefs about gender that are accepted by men and women). The hidden curriculum in schools may incorporate discriminatory practices and transmit a gender-based belief system.

This gender-based ideology may be accepted or resisted by students and teachers. Anyon (1982) suggests that gender development "involves not so much passive imprinting as active response to social contradictions." Girls have to cope with and resolve contradictory social messages about appropriate behavior for females on the one hand and appropriate behavior for achievers in the competitive world of school and work on the other. Anyon suggests that their responses often involve both accommodation and resistance to these contradictions.

Examining the hidden curriculum from a feminist perspective is particularly important in physical education because of the strong association between sport and masculinity (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983) and because of the extreme "feminine" concern about the appearance of the female body (Brownmiller, 1984; Chernin, 1981; Orbach, 1978). The liberal feminist emphasis in such research tends to focus upon equal opportunity: girls' access to instruction, practice, and playing time. A critical analysis must go beyond this to an examination of the culture in physical education as it relates to and maintains patriarchy.

Several aspects of the lived culture in physical education seem worthy of study. The way in which the individualistic, competitive performance environment affects males and females is of particular importance. Willis (1982, p. 120) suggests that critical theory "accepts differences in sport performance between men and women, accepts that cultural factors may well enlarge this gap, but is most interested in the manner in which this gap is understood and taken up in the popular consciousness of our society." He asks why some differences but not others are viewed as important. Why for example are differences in strength important while differences in flexibility are not? Willis argues that sports performance serves to reinforce ideology about male supremacy. He and others (Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983; Felshin, 1974; Heide, 1978) have suggested that feminists may need to redefine sport and its standards of performance if sexism is to be eliminated.
A second area to be investigated is the social construction of body image for males and females. Heinemann (1980) proposes that the body is a social fact, that the handling of the body, the regulation and control of its functions, and our attitudes toward it are not "natural" but socially created. Willis (1982) indicates that the media treatment of women in sport often has a sexual innuendo in which the sexual identity often takes precedence over the sport identity of female athletes. Chernin (1981) suggests that women's obsession with diet and exercise reflects a dislike for the female body. Kollen (1981) found that students in physical education classes experience self-consciousness and embarrassment as a result of being continually on display. Each of these threads suggest that physical education's role in the development of body image needs to be examined.

The final aspect of the hidden curriculum in physical education that requires examination from a feminist perspective is the dualism which reflects and reinforces the separation of the private and public domains of life. Such a division which sees the public domain of work and politics as the man's world and the private realm of the family and emotion as the woman's sphere is at the heart of the patriarchal system (Eisenstein, 1981). This separation is ideologically represented by the dualisms of mind and body, instrumental and expressive activity, and work and play. To the extent that physical education programs reflect such dualisms, they may reinforce the sexual division of labor in society.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to examine the theoretical bases for research on the hidden curriculum, summarize related research in physical education, and propose a model for feminist analysis of the hidden curriculum in sport and physical education. To some extent, it reflects my own journey from a naive, atheoretical description of the hidden curriculum to a radical feminist analysis of how patriarchal society is reproduced and transformed in the process of schooling, particularly within sport and physical education.

This analysis has focused upon sexism, but pervasive effects of class and especially race in sport and physical education should also be noted. Future examinations of the hidden curriculum need to investigate each of these (gender, class, and race) not only separately but in interaction with each other.

The final step in the critical theory model for research is the identification of action which leads to transformation of society. One role of the research is to identify "gaps and tensions" in the process of social reproduction which provide possibilities for political action (Giroux, 1981a). Giroux (1981c, p. 218) states, "While it would be naive and misleading to claim that schools alone can create the conditions for social change, it would be equally naive to argue that working in schools does not matter."

References


