

Curriculum definition essay sample

[Education](#), [Curriculum](#)



“ Curriculum is perceived as a plan or program for all the experiences that the learner encounters under the direction of the school” (Oliva and Gordon, 2013, p. 7). To the outside world, curriculum may be seen as the planned interaction of pupils with instructional content, materials, resources, and processes for evaluating the attainment of educational objectives according to the Oxford English Dictionary. However, as educators, creating a working definition for curriculum requires a delicate balance of ideas. As a people and as a society, we are ever evolving. It is necessary then, that curriculum needs to evolve to meet the needs of the population it educates as well. English and Larson (1996) have observed three forms of curriculum present in schools: formal, informal, and hidden (Carrick, 2001 p. 24). Formal curriculum is the official planned experiences that are adopted by districts and are aligned to mandates like the Common Core Standards. They include both knowledge and skills that the school expects successful students to acquire. It can be observed and measured (Ebert, Ebert, and Bentley, 2013). Oliver (Oliva and Gordon, 2013, p. 7) would call this the program of studies. Informal curriculum exists in the underlying values reflected in the formal curriculum.

It can be equated with Oliver’s concept of a program of experiences. Carrick (2014) maintains that it includes content that teachers add to the formal curriculum to promote deeper thinking. Overall content is “ what” is taught formally but the underlying principles are the “ how” and “ why” of teaching and learning. Thus, curriculum is that which an individual learner experiences as a result of schooling (Oliva and Gordon 2013, p. 4) The hidden curriculum is perhaps the most intriguing. It includes lessons that

arise from the culture of the school and the behaviors, attitudes and expectations that characterize that culture (Ebert, Ebert, and Bentley, 2013) many of which may be unplanned. Teacher enthusiasm, school climate and classroom décor and student interactions all add to the hidden curriculum. While tolerance may be part of the formal curriculum for character education, multiethnic acceptance may grow from the diversity of a particular school and thus be considered hidden since it is not taught explicitly.

Geneva Gay states (Oliva and Gordon 2013, p. 5) “ If we are to achieve equally, we must broaden our conception to include the entire culture of the school- not just the subject matter content.” Current movement toward accountability has shifted curriculum from experiences to outcomes. Grey (2010) says that curriculum can be broken down into the written, the taught, and the tested. Madaus (1988) states that “ it is testing and not the “ official” state curriculum that has come to determine what is being taught in today’s classrooms thus swaying the historical pendulum.” We live in a time when, according to Johnson and Peshkin, (Carrick, 2001, p. 19) “ taxpayers and parents expect the school to provide everything from student safety to community solidarity.”

While a given school district may develop a well rounded curriculum tailored to the needs of their students and reflecting the Common Core Standards, teachers are very aware of the importance placed on high stakes testing. This is especially true in the last two years as teacher evaluations have been tied to test results. Robert M. Gagne referred to the curriculum as a “

structured series of learning outcomes,” that are conducive to the measurable and emphasized goal at hand these days: student success on standardized tests (Olivia & Gordon, 2013). It makes sense then, that curriculum is the sum of everything we teach and do within the classroom. By necessity it is a living thing, always growing and changing to meet the needs of all learners.

Works Cited

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