Contextualizing Teaching

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Introduction to Education and Educational Foundations

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Curriculum Issues and Debates

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we discuss various definitions of curriculum and instruction, the implications these definitions hold for teachers and students, examples of curricular programs and practices you will meet in your career and controversies surrounding the day-to-day implementation of curriculum and instruction strategies in the social context of contemporary American education. We also offer our reflections on the national debates about curriculum, as well as stories of individual teachers struggling daily to create stimulating and meaningful instructional programs for their students.

You will discover that both the definitions of curriculum and the purposes of instruction are controversial issues. As a preservice education student you may have the impression that curriculum and instruction are simply the subjects and materials teachers present to students in classrooms. While different school districts prescribe different textbooks, activities, tests and resources, the general impression is that the differences in books, instructional styles of teachers and school district curriculum guides are merely local idiosyncrasies while what the schools teach remains basically the same. Some believe, for example, that algebra, literature, science, geography and history are specific bodies of information that are identical everywhere, and that instruction always has the same purpose: imparting this knowledge to students. The evaluation of the curriculum that follows becomes, then, an objective test score or grade that measures how much of the knowledge students retain. Thus curriculum, instruction and evaluation have often been presumed to be uncontested concepts with universal application.

This traditional understanding of curriculum and instruction strongly influenced U.S. education throughout the nineteenth
A Contemporary Vision of Curriculum

Among the many emerging concepts of curriculum, some educators now suggest that a curriculum includes all of a student’s experiences in school, at home, in the community and through the media. Other definitions suggest that the curriculum is a process of understanding the self in relation to the world, not simply the concrete information students must memorize or master. Contemporary scholars analogize instruction to a personal journey, with the teacher as travel guide, advisor, author, wise mentor or philosopher more concerned with the growth, maturity and empowerment of each student than with the information each student regurgitates on standardized tests. In this conception, evaluation becomes an authentic expression of each student’s unique understanding and application of learning in a journal, portfolio or project. These reconceptualized visions of curriculum, instruction and evaluation enjoy popularity in some school districts, and some teachers now implement practices based on this philosophy. These practices are also controversial, however, and many other school districts resist or reject them.

As a teacher you will be confronted with both traditional and reconceptualized understandings of curriculum and instruction in the schools where you teach. You will often be required to choose instructional strategies, teaching materials, grading practices, textbook series, evaluation methods and other curriculum tools and strategies for your classroom or, as a member of a curriculum committee, your entire district. Although this chapter will help you understand the traditional and reconceptualized paradigms of curriculum and instruction, you should know that we strongly support the contemporary view of curriculum, instruction and evaluation just outlined.

We recommend an inclusive, contextual and autobiographical model for teaching, learning and assessment because we believe that the context of education can no longer be minimized, as traditional programs have done. We support the reconceptualized definition of curriculum and instruction that values all of the experiences teachers and students bring to bear on institutional schooling: classroom activities, extracurricular clubs and teams, cocurricular events, family experiences, peer group initiations and political perspectives, as well as the unintended outcomes of schooling practices that affect the psychology, ethics, spirituality, intuitive sensibilities, creativity and relationships of everyone in schools.

In short, our “holistic model” values the social and cultural contexts of the schooling process. We believe that students are more than mere receptors of inert information, and teachers more than mere functionaries who rely on prepackaged...
and rote instructional practices to dispense this information. Teachers and students are complex, dynamic and creative individuals who must be encouraged to explore the meanings of history, mathematics, science, literature, geography, sports, arts, politics, religion and all dimensions of human investigation using their unique talents while engaged in a community or learners on a journey of discovery toward wisdom.

Our vision moves beyond a static and universal application of knowledge with predetermined outcomes and prepackaged methodologies to a dynamic and contextual process of teaching and learning. T. S. Eliot critiqued the rational obsessions of the modern world—and, by implication, modern schooling—when he asked in his poem “Choruses from the Rock” the following provocative questions:

*The endless cycle of idea and action.  
Endless invention, endless experiment.  
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness;  
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;  
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.  
All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance . . .  
Where is the life we have lost in living?  
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?  
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information? (1971, p. 96)*

Eliot’s poem succinctly synopsizes our vision of curriculum, instruction and evaluation. Education is about communities committed to justice, democracy, compassion and ecological sustainability. These communities constantly ask questions, initiate dialogue and seek wisdom. The answers and solutions are not predetermined: knowledge is more than just information transmission. Like T. S. Eliot, we have noticed that this wisdom has been lost in modern schooling and wonder how it might return. We search for a way to reinvigorate education with a reconceptualized vision of the curriculum.

**FIVE DEFINITIONS OF CURRICULUM**

Understanding the reasons for the commitment of modern schooling to transmission of information models of curriculum and instruction requires an awareness of the conflicting definitions of curriculum itself. As you read the five following definitions, remember that U.S. schooling practices reflect ideological beliefs about society and culture and philosophical understandings of politics and education. Ponder these definitions and imagine how your classroom might look and feel if it were guided by each of these definitions.

**Curriculum as Subject Matter**

Some view the curriculum as the essential knowledge contained in the academic subjects taught in schools and included in the great books of literature, science,
mathematics, philosophy and the humanities. This definition of curriculum assumes that what is taught by teachers and studied in books is identical to what students learn. This definition fails to address these epistemological questions: What is “essential” knowledge? Does knowledge change? If so, should subjects also change? Who decides what knowledge is “essential” and will be included in the curriculum?

Curriculum for Social Adaptation

This definition of curriculum focuses on the short-term needs of individuals and society. Subjects under study are those most useful for securing employment or addressing immediate community problems in the labor force, in economics, in society and so forth. Schools are encouraged to accommodate themselves to society as it exists rather than change society. Thus the curriculum should turn out a well-trained workforce. This definition ignores such questions as these: What is “useful” knowledge or “gainful” employment? If we focus only on short-term needs, technical preparation and job skills, what happens to long-term vision, intellectual development and individual creativity? Is living in the world simply a matter of functional expediency, or should other aesthetic, spiritual, psychological and political issues guide curriculum and schooling for the long-term benefit of individuals and society?

Curriculum as Planned Activities

This definition emphasizes the responsibility of the school district for planning the learning and ensuring that students retain what is taught. It raises the question of the significance of the planned activities: How do we know that the planned curriculum is the best curriculum? Who decides what to include and exclude among the planned activities? Can teachers really exclude from the curriculum the unplanned questions, events and ideas that emerge in the classroom? Should the school district restrict the learning activities? If so, precisely how does it decide what to include and exclude?

The Curriculum Includes All Student Experiences Related to Schooling

This definition includes everything students learn under the guidance of the school, planned or not. Personal questions, extracurricular activities, spiritual experiences, team sporting events, creative insights, library research, peer-group interaction, ethnic heritage and playground relationships—all of these provide important learning sources. Some contend that this definition provides no basis for differentiating between positive and negative experiences, and that it makes the responsibility of the school too broad. Some questions we must ask are: What are the limits, if any, to the areas of learning to be covered in the curriculum? With limited resources and overcrowded learning environments, how can schools man-
age a curriculum under such a broad definition? What is the difference between “planned activities” and “experiences,” and which should the school direct? How can schools distinguish between positive and negative experiences?

The Curriculum Includes All Student Experiences in the Course of Living

This definition expands the curriculum to include all experiences, both in and out of school. Learning is not restricted to the school, but one can integrate all one's experiences and activities into a unified learning process. Some question how the schools can plan any instruction at all if every experience counts as legitimate knowledge. On the other hand, some teachers purposely plan activities in the context of these life experiences to enhance formal instruction. This definition requires that we explore the relationship between individual lives and schooling activities. Who or what decides or guides the course of individual lives? What is the relationship between life experiences and schooling experiences? Are all experiences equally valid in the teaching and learning process? How can the issues of confidentiality, privacy, and individual rights be protected under such a broad definition of curriculum?

Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum and instruction are the heart and soul of schooling. You will find your career intimately bound up with books, academic resources, instructional materials, analyses of students’ learning styles and classroom practices, curriculum committees, student research projects, testing and evaluation procedures, extracurricular activities, students’ personal questions, the life experiences of colleagues and students, and the special academic needs of your students. We consider it essential to explore the definitions of curriculum and instruction to help you to deal with the many classroom challenges ahead. This investigation will help you become what Donald Schön calls “the reflective practitioner.”

Schön (1983, 1987, 1991) challenged professionals to examine their purpose and function in society. In effect, he insisted that we cannot separate the thinking about the meaning of our profession from the practice of our profession. In Chapter 1 we presented the similar concept that theory cannot be separated from practice, which explains the applicability of a contextual understanding of schooling, and in Chapter 9 we discussed teachers as researchers who are empowered by reflection in action. More particularly, Schön encouraged educators to overcome the distracting and tiring effects of bureaucracy, disconnectedness and inertia by promoting learning through experience. Schön’s recommendations are reminiscent of the philosophy of John Dewey, introduced in Chapters 1 and 8. Dewey called for democratic participation, investigations that rely on the scientific method and learning through experience in schools.
JOHN DEWEY'S CONTINUING RELEVANCE

John Dewey (1859-1952), the American philosopher and educator who viewed education as a process of social activity related to democracy, experience and active learning, has been mentioned throughout this book. We have pointed out that he sought to establish a continuity between the student's world of experiences and a curriculum that arises out of and develops the student's experience. Dewey realized that this experience naturally stimulates motivation and interest. Critics of Dewey still challenge this observation, contending that adults have an important (some even say exclusive) role in transmitting the American culture. In addition, critics insist that students must apply themselves to learning basic information before they can develop interests and motivation. The debates between those who encourage experience as the basis of learning and those who insist that effort and knowledge precede interest continues today.

We agree with Dewey that student experience is an essential element of the learning process. In fact, by ignoring the living context of each student, schooling creates an atmosphere of drudgery and boredom. Such an atmosphere saps the desire for learning. How can the curriculum reignite the passion for learning? Is it possible for students to study and learn scientific, mathematical, literary and historical concepts and artistic, creative, physical and mental skills in an environment in which experience is the primary focus? Consider the following example.

Freshman Studies Example

Most universities require a course, variously called "freshman orientation" or "freshman studies," for all freshmen as an introduction to college. Colleges typically design these courses to provide incoming students with information about college life, campus activities, the library, study skills and so on. Some such courses also include an introduction to college-level reading and writing. You probably took a similar course as part of your required college curriculum. Colleges and universities have struggled for years to create meaningful freshman orientation courses, usually with mixed results and sometimes with little success. Undergraduates often complain that these courses waste time or are irrelevant to their college education. An experimental freshman seminar at a midwestern university set out to address these objections.

A colleague of ours teaches a freshman seminar entitled "Autobiography and the Whole Person: Get a Life." In 1996 professors at this university were asked to add one section of the freshman seminar to their teaching load. With minimal requirements—only that they include some quality reading and writing assignments—twenty professors designed their own courses, selected their own titles and compiled their own readings and activities assignments. The course titles, syllabuses and reading lists were advertised in advance, and the freshmen could select the course that most interested them.

Some sections read Shakespeare, others read Zen and still others studied Latin American women novelists. Some professors organized visits to museums and
plays: others created art shows and produced segments of plays. Students in some courses wrote research papers about novels; others composed poetry or journals.

Our friend's syllabus included a novel by Ernest Gaines, the Broadway musical Pippin, dream analysis related to the work of Carl Jung, an art museum visit to study Jackson Pollock and Georgia O'Keeffe and autobiographical journals. The overall success of the experimental program related more to the freedom of each professor to create a syllabus related to her or his areas of interest and experience than to a standardized curriculum. The success also depended on students' selecting a section of the course that best connected to their interests and experiences.

While some might find fault with the diversity and flexibility of this course as it was taught, most participating professors found that beginning with topics of interest rather than mandated methodologies and assignments made it far stronger and more enjoyable than the usual freshman orientation course. In other words, a dynamic educational experience emerged.

The professors also discovered that, freed from absolute concepts of knowledge and reality, students tend to question and then understand inherited traditions and values. This understanding, in turn, leads to invention, discovery and innovation. Students can then use knowledge as an instrument for solving problems in their postmodern world. Contrived methodologies and predetermined information deaden this spirit of inquiry. The freshman seminar experiment provided an opportunity for both professors and students to explore reading, writing, visual art, music and the self reflectively and experientially. In short, it provided a contextual introduction to the college learning environment the students could understand and appreciate (Carv, 1999).

On a trip with students to the Cleveland Museum of Art, one of us participated in an individual discovery project in which we discussed the importance of phenomenological experiences while the class lingered in front of a Jackson Pollock painting for nearly an hour. The students were told the story about my own encounter with Pollock at about their age, a story that created the context for the learning experience. The response of one student, in particular, we will relate shortly. First, though, here is that story.

My journey to understand and appreciate art contextually and experientially began in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City during a high school senior trip. Our teacher took us there to view a retrospective exhibit of the history of art from medieval times through abstract-expressionism. I walked hurriedly through the art of the ages with my high school friends, eager to reach the end and order pizza for lunch. As we entered the final gallery, a huge canvas covering an entire wall startled us. It was filled with swirls of color, particles of glass and dirt, random drippings and splashes from paint brushes and buckets. We all laughed at the mess, and we wondered aloud why it would be included in a major art exhibit. As I reached the turnstile to leave, a magnetic pull from the painting caused me to freeze. I had to go back and investigate this strange painting. My teacher agreed to let me stay and rejoin the group after lunch.
I stood alone before Jackson Pollock’s Autumn Rhythm. The intensity of the emotions struck a chord. I sensed the pain of the artist’s struggles and suffering, which resonated with my own turmoil. Pollock’s frustration with social structures matched my own indignation over the Vietnam War and racism. I sensed Pollock’s inner battle and connected them to my own life. My father’s alcoholism crossed my mind, and later I learned that Pollock also fought this disease. I did not “know” Jackson Pollock’s work at the time, but I felt his emotions in Autumn Rhythm.

Hundreds of people must have come and gone while I lingered in the room, but time stood still for me. I am not a painter; I have never studied art formally. Yet I became united with Jackson Pollock through his painting. When I left to catch up with my friends, I decided to keep my mysterious experience in front of Autumn Rhythm to myself.

Jackson Pollock continues to influence my life and education. I experienced a phenomenological moment of revelation and personal understanding that, like the beauty and intensity of nature in autumn, shapes my life. Studying the technical details of the abstract-expressionist style or reading a biography of Pollock could never have replaced that empathic experience in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. But after my encounter with Autumn Rhythm I devoured every book available about Pollock and his art. I visit museums regularly to find new Pollock paintings, reflect on the changes in my life since first seeing Autumn Rhythm and discover new experiences of art and artists to inspire and instruct me. All of which explains why I included Jackson Pollock on my freshman seminar syllabus. While I am hardly a professor of art, my personal experiences with art provide a rich resource that inevitably find their way into my successful teaching.

**The Importance of Experience**

The story about *Autumn Rhythm* and Jackson Pollock illustrates the educational importance of experience. Knowledge is rarely ordered logically and waiting to be discovered; rather, it is constructed in random and spontaneous experiences. As Suzuki, Fromm and DeMartino observed, “The intellect may raise all kinds of questions—and it is perfectly right for it to do so—but to expect a final answer from the intellect is asking too much of it, for this is not in the nature of intellect. The answer lies deeply buried under the bedrock of our being” (1960, pp. 48-49). *Autumn Rhythm* provided no answers for the intellect, but it did touch the bedrock of one individual’s being and initiated a search for meaning and understanding, not only about art history, abstract-expressionism and Jackson Pollock, but also and most significantly about the purpose of life, the reasons for suffering, the tragedy of alcoholism and the relationship between inner confusion and turmoil. The visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art was more than a scheduled lesson, it was a border crossing, a seminal moment, an empathic event—an authentic curricular experience—that initiated a journey...
into the realm of contemporary art and postmodern living. This experience created a context within which the future study of art has been eminently vitalizing and educational.

**The Implications of Narrative**

Experiences of transformative pedagogy such as this challenge the educational community to reevaluate the traditional understanding of the learning environment and the teaching process. Even such a traditionalist educator as Mortimer Adler could write, “Our concern with education must go beyond schooling... Education is a lifelong process of which schooling is only a small part... Schooling should open the doors to the world of learning” (1982, pp. 9-11).

Perhaps John Dewey provided the most thoughtful analysis of aesthetics in education in *Art as Experience*. Dewey (1934b) wrote about the significance of the arts and concluded: “In the end, works of art are the only media of complete and unhindered communication between man and man that can occur in a world full of gullies and walls that limit community of experience” (1934b, p. 105).

Education philosopher Maxine Greene (1978, 1995) referred to an attention to those alternatives that provide hope as “wide-awakeness.” She argued for a strong emphasis on arts and humanities to promote this wide-awakeness and self-understanding that can emerge from synthetic moments like the one in the Met. Greene turned to Henry David Thoreau for inspiration: “Thoreau writes passionately about throwing off sleep. He talks about how few people are awake enough for a poetic or divine life. He suggests that to be awake is to be alive” (1978, p. 162).

David Orr also turned to Thoreau for understanding: “Thoreau did not research Walden Pond; rather, he went to live ‘deliberately’” (1992, p. 125). Thus, *Walden* became a mosaic of philosophy, poetry, natural history, geology, folklore, archeology, economics, politics and education for Thoreau, and in this sense aesthetics leads to wholeness. As Orr explained, “Thoreau’s subject matter was Thoreau: his goal, wholeness; his tool, Walden Pond; and his methodology, simplification” (p. 125). This is the antithesis of the modern curriculum that artificially separates subject matter, isolates and analyzes discrete parts and obfuscates simple beauty. Orr concluded:

Aside from its merits as literature or philosophy, Walden is an antidote to the idea that education is a passive, indoor activity occurring between the ages of six and twenty-one. In contrast to the tendencies to segregate disciplines, and to segregate intellect from its surroundings, Walden is a model of the possible unity between personhood, pedagogy, and place. For Thoreau, Walden was more than his location. It was a laboratory for observation and experimentation; a library of data about geology, history, flora, fauna; a source of inspiration and renewal; and a testing ground for the man. Walden is no monologue, it is a dialogue between a man and a place. In a sense, Walden wrote Thoreau. His genius, I think, was to allow himself to be shaped by his place, to allow it to speak with his voice. (pp. 123-126)
We see here the reconceptualized vision of curriculum we recommended earlier: the inspiration of nature and poetry; the unity of self, pedagogy and place; beginnings through encounters with places; encouragement for the voice of self-expression.

The Freshman Seminar Students Respond

This understanding of curriculum and experience, rooted in John Dewey’s philosophy, guided our colleague’s freshman seminar visit to an art museum. Following a review of many styles of art and a discussion of Dewey’s philosophy of art, the students went out alone into the Cleveland Museum of Art for an hour of reflection and with instructions to encounter some work of art themselves, a phenomenological exercise that had a profound impact on one student.

The class later gathered in a coffeehouse near the museum and for several hours described their experiences. One student reported his encounter with a huge Anselm Kiefer canvas. He thought about his own life as he followed the image of two railroad tracks to the vanishing point at the center of the painting. He said he felt uneasy, almost frightened, and when he read the adjacent discussion of Kiefer’s concerns with World War II, the Holocaust and modern ecological destruction, his uneasy feelings became more concrete. “I almost felt,” he said, “as though I were present at the Holocaust.” The student also reported that he had always suspected his immigrant grandparents were hiding something from him about his heritage. The Kiefer painting touched a nerve, and he was now eager to explore his genealogy and reflect on his identity. Later he indeed discovered that his “Christian” grandparents were really Jewish exiles who converted out of fear of death. Thus the freshman seminar has given opportunities both to learn about reading, writing art and music and to associate learning with lived lives. In short, we can reinvigorate schooling with a passion for exploring the fine arts, science, mathematics, literature and all dimensions of learning from a contextual perspective, and learn about life in the process.

Synthetic Moments and the Curriculum

While the past informs and conditions the present, every moment also contains possibilities for change and new directions. The aesthetic experience can inspire new personal realizations, as for the student described above or one author’s experience in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. An aesthetic approach to curriculum ensures that consequential learning will occur because the life experiences of the student become intimately bound up in the learning process. As Dewey explained in Art as Experience:

A work of art, no matter how old or classic, is actually not just potentially, a work of art only when it lives in some individual experience. A piece of parchment, of marble, of canvas, it remains self-identical throughout the ages. But as a work of art it is re-created every time it is aesthetically experienced. . . . The Parthenon, or
This aesthetic encounter with art as a recreation that continues to inspire, enlighten, inform and teach is exactly the kind of experience teachers must nurture and direct. No universal curriculum or inert knowledge awaits memorization. There is only a process of contextualizing the experiences of students and teachers in order to create and recreate understanding and knowledge in each encounter with art, music, literature, history and science. Pablo Picasso described artistic creation in a similar way:

*A picture is not thought out and settled beforehand. While it is being done it changes as one’s thoughts change. And when it is finished it still goes on changing according to the state of mind of whoever is looking at it. A picture lives a life like a living creature, undergoing the changes imposed on us by our life from day to day. This is natural enough, as the picture lives only through the person who is looking at it.* (1971, p. 268)

Picasso and Dewey each described one of the important phenomenological dimensions of the reconceptualized curriculum we are proposing: Events find their meaning in subjective encounters where knowledge is constructed and reconstructed in every new situation. In this sense, a work of art exists only in the encounter. Locked in a darkened vault, a painting is simply an aggregate of materials. Art, like curriculum, is the process of becoming and recreating in each new situation. Experiences require descriptions in the curriculum so that each student and teacher can understand and create the world. The purpose is not just to describe phenomena or memorize information—say, an artist or a painting—but to understand what lies behind them, their being or ontology.

As you can see, a phenomenological understanding of curriculum (as we explained in Chapter 9) replaces the modern obsession with standardized literature and fine arts interpretations (particularly and ironically, in humanities departments), predetermined methodologies, dictated writing, painting and researching styles and universal explanations of reality applied to knowledge acquisition. Experientially based learning, by contrast, leads to the creation of landscapes of learning and synthetic moments of self-understanding, which supports our case for reconceptualized curriculum and instruction. In fact, aesthetic experiences like those just described may ultimately be the only justification for our teaching, or even of our very existence. As Friedrich Nietzsche wrote in *The Birth of Tragedy*, “We have our highest dignity in our significance as works of art—for it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified” (1968, p. 52).

Understanding the insights of John Dewey and other philosophers of education could make the difference between a career of monotony, drudgery and conflict and or a career of excitement, diversity and engagement. A curriculum can provide great satisfaction if approached from an informed and reflective stance. We encourage you to be a reflective teacher who navigates the difficult and sometimes controversial understandings of curriculum, instruction and evaluation in the institutional context of schooling.
THE VALUE IN THE CLASSROOM OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Our discussion of the importance of starting curriculum studies with student experience and the context of learning may initially appeal to many preservice teachers. Yet once in school, they often avoid contextualizing teaching. Some blame the bureaucracy. School boards, state departments and administrators often insist on predetermined objectives and goals. Along with mandated standardized tests to measure the retention of the information deemed important, the school structure, with its short time blocks and crowded classrooms, limits the freedom of both teachers and students. Financial, transportation and other logistical factors often constrain teachers as well. One of the greatest obstacles to an experientially based curriculum and learning process, however, is the school system's typical reliance on norm-referenced and criterion-referenced testing.

Norm-referenced tests are standardized tests used to compare individual student results with the scores of a norm group. You took many of these tests as a student. The ACT is used for college admission. The CAT, Iowa Basics and other achievement tests are given to elementary students in many districts, annually in some schools and on alternating years in others. These tests are scored in various ways, the most common being percentile, grade-level equivalency and stanine achievement brackets. The general impression is that the percentile score allows parents, teachers and the community to compare their students' results to those of students elsewhere. This approach to testing raises several problems, however.

NORM-REFERENCED TESTING AND CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT

First, students are not compared to all of the other students who took the norm-referenced test at the same time. Their scores are compared to the norm group—a control group of students who took the test several months or years earlier. The norm group is a statistical sample of a student population. School districts may choose from various norm groups the testing companies offer. Should a school district compare its students to a sample of the general population, students from northeastern private schools, inner-city public school students or Catholic school students? Who decides on the composition of the norm groups? When a student receives a percentile score, who are the students in the norm group he or she is being compared to? School officials rarely address these questions because the answers could present difficult issues. John Cannell, a West Virginia physician, brought this problem to national attention in 1987. Joseph Newman reported on Cannell's project:

Cannell thought that the news sounded a little too good when he heard that, in almost every local school system in his state, the scores of elementary students on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills were above the national norm. Since West Virginia, one of the nation's poorest states, ranks low on most other educational indicators, the doctor was surprised. Checking several neighboring states, he found
that their students, too, were above average. He [later] discovered that state superintendents in every state boasted that their students are above average. In other words, scoring above the norm is the norm (1998, p. 259).

How can everyone score above the norm? Simple. Since some testing companies only norm tests every few years—that is, they create new sample control groups for comparison purposes—school districts have time to "align" the curriculum. Testing companies norm tests only now and then because to do so is expensive. Testing companies are businesses; they want to make money and keep their customers satisfied. Testing companies that can provide above-average scores to a given school district are assured of continued business. Such companies have no vested interest in challenging the curriculum alignment process.

"Curriculum alignment" refers to matching the curriculum to the test. In other words, teachers specifically emphasize material students will encounter on the tests. Sometimes this proceeds honestly, as when teachers try to find ways to enhance student learning in preparation for the test. Other times it proceeds dishonestly, as when teachers and students secure copies of material on the test—or simply recall what was on it from the previous year. We remember a local newspaper printing a copy of the answer key to a standardized test the week before the test was to be administered. Even as the issue sold out on the street, the newspaper sent an investigative reporter to uncover the scandal of inadequate test security.

**Test Security**

As a teacher you will often have to prepare students for standardized tests and then administer them. Why should test security be a concern? Why would a teacher or administrator steal or cheat or act dishonestly? The reason problems with test security and honesty in the evaluation process arise relates directly to the pressure on educators and students to perform well. Scholarships, college admissions and athletic eligibility—all of these objectives and more put pressure on students to perform well on tests. As a teacher you will face tremendous pressure as well. Some states offer merit pay plans that tie salaries to student performance on standardized tests. Other districts publish the names of the teachers and the average test scores for their students. In such a situation your principles might conflict with your job, your students, community reputation or financial interest.

Administrators, who often are held personally accountable for the overall success of their schools on standardized and state-mandated tests, face other pressures. Just as a football coach with a poor record may be fired, so do principals face the same kind of pressure, particularly in those school districts where the local papers publish student performance rates. One secondary school principal reported a dilemma he faced in preparing his school "report card," a published list of all high schools in his district with the following information: the average ACT scores of
the senior class, the number of expulsions, the number of suspensions, the total dollar amount of scholarships awarded and so forth. The coverage invited the entire community to rate the school's and the principal's success on this report card.

In calculating the average ACT score of the senior class, the principal found a mid-year transfer student on the list. (This is a common occurrence in schools.) The "turn-over rate" of students reflects the number of students who drop out or transfer to another school after the beginning of the school year and the number of new students admitted during the year compared to the initial student enrollment. The rate can range from anywhere near 10 percent to as high as 90 percent in some schools. This raises the question of which scores to include on the school report card. Back to our principal. He was preparing to ask the superintendent not to include this student's ACT score in the class average since she had not yet begun studies at her new school. He planned to argue that her ACT score would not indicate the quality of the faculty and the curriculum at her new school. However, he changed his mind when he saw that the transfer student had already taken the ACT and scored a 32, a score that would raise the senior class average, improve the school report card, and make the faculty and principal look better in the public's eyes.

The principal told us this story several years after it happened. He still felt remorse for his dishonesty. He was upset, as well, that he and his counselors had systematically discouraged academically weak students from taking the ACT. Despite the fact that some students could have benefitted from taking the ACT, the counselors and administrators were worried about their jobs, their merit pay, and the public perception of their performance on their annual report card. Why, they thought, encourage students who may never attend college to take the test and lower the class average? In Chapter 3, we provided several examples of situations in which students were tracked or limited in their educational opportunities because of political-ideological reasons. Here is yet another example.

Standardized testing, as suggested earlier, is a multi-million-dollar business with high-stakes implications. It should come as no surprise, then, that it is riddled with fraud, dishonesty, and deceit. It should also be clear that curriculum alignment is a natural consequence of the emphasis on standardized testing. As many educators understand, the testing "tail" too often wags the curriculum "dog." Some educators resign themselves to standardized testing as inherent in the teaching and learning process, despite the negative impact it has on the curriculum. We resist this attitude. If we are to achieve an experienced-based curriculum, we must reduce the emphasis on standardized testing (Owen, 1999).

**Criterion-Referenced Testing**

As if it were not enough that norm-referenced tests now drive the school curriculum, educational bureaucrats, state government officials and religious fundamentalists have collaborated in recent years to sabotage the curriculum with another series of tests. As an outgrowth of the "accountability movement" of the 1980s
discussed in Chapters 3 and 8, many school districts now mandate criterion-referenced tests, sometimes called "proficiency tests," "exit exams," "minimum competency exams" or "mastery exams" because they measure how much information a student has "mastered" in each subject area.

These tests generally include multiple-choice recall questions about the factual material of state or district curriculum guides for specific courses. Occasionally, as in Kentucky in the early 1990s, a portfolio is included. Some states include a writing sample; however, a rubric (standard guide for grading) is used by trained examiners to ensure conformity. Some states have dropped the writing component because examiners have been idiosyncratic and scores have varied greatly. Help is on the way, however, with new computer programs that can "grade" essay questions.

These tests are supposed to ensure that students know specific basic information about reading, writing, computation and other subjects. The logic appeals to some: Test the students to make sure that they can pass basic reading, writing and math before promoting them to the next grade or allowing them to graduate. Some states even require that students pass these proficiency tests before they receive a driver’s license or promotion to the next grade level.

We have many concerns about these tests. First, teachers pressured to ensure that their students pass the criterion-referenced test spend huge amounts of time drilling minimal competency skills. This preoccupation eliminates the possibility of any experience-based approach. Second, memorizing information hardly ensures a long-term memory or even a short-term engagement with the learning process. Third, learning is reduced to memorization rather than critical application, scientific investigation and understanding. Fourth, students who perform poorly on written tests have no other chances for demonstrating learning proficiency. Fifth, as we explained in Part 3, the political implications of allowing educational bureaucrats, state lawmakers and testing companies to determine the content of the "basic curriculum" are complex and frightening.

The proficiency test movement appears to be reducing the curriculum to a small body of inert information disconnected from the contextual experiences of the learning process. Disaffected students lose interest in school and drop out. Teachers who are already under extreme pressure lose their interest in and enthusiasm for academic investigation and experiential learning. Teaching and learning in an environment like this become an assembly-line function devoid of critical inquiry and investigation.

To move beyond the minimal competency and proficiency testing mentality of modern schooling, teachers must equip themselves with other models and possibilities, which happen to be the goal of this chapter. Before we continue our discussion of reconceptualized visions of curriculum and instruction, however, we will review the traditional concept of curriculum to ensure that you understand the philosophy that drives the modern classroom. Although we promote a contextual experience-based approach to curriculum, instruction and evaluation, we recognize that accountability movements and proficiency test requirements exert a tremendous influence on all teachers, especially beginning teachers concerned
about job security, tenure and acceptance in the profession. Accordingly, the following overview of the traditional approaches to curriculum will help you to investigate the reconceptualized curriculum within the current context of schooling.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

People generally associate the "school curriculum" with all the lesson plans, books, scope and sequence guides, published materials and learning objectives teachers use for instruction. In this sense "curriculum" is understood as all of the planned learning events the school directs in such subjects as mathematics, reading, language arts, social studies, science, physical education and the arts. The following paragraphs discuss twelve elements of a traditional curriculum and instruction program.

1. Aims, goals and objectives. "Aims," "goals" and "objectives" are terms used to describe what education does and how it proceeds. "Aims" are often considered the broadest purposes and "objectives" the most specific and incremental. All three terms describe the direction of teaching and learning. Those long-range goals we seek to accomplish are called "ends" or "end points" by Ralph Tyler (1949) and Hilda Taba (1962). Often both the goals and the objectives of the curriculum are determined by faculty committees, school board requirements, state or district guidelines, testing companies, publishers or a combination of two or more of these.

2. Behavioral objectives. Individual teachers are often asked to write specific statements outlining the ends they hope to accomplish with their classroom lessons. These short statements form the basis of a unit of study or a daily lesson plan that guides the teaching and learning process. Also, teachers must often write a series of statements of exactly what the students will do in each class session and match these statements with a district or state curriculum guide on a scope and sequence chart.

3. Scope and sequence chart. A scope and sequence chart provides a comprehensive list of the topics to be covered in a particular subject, course of studies or textbook—the scope—with the exact order in which each topic will be taught at each grade level—the sequence. For example, the publisher of an elementary school reading program generally provides a textbook for each student and a teacher's manual with test banks, answer keys, resource materials and recommended lessons for the teacher, along with a chart that lists every topic and skill covered in the student textbook series. The chart shows when to introduce each topic or skill in the program and when the students should review and master each skill. The scope and sequence guide is thus an overview of the written curriculum of the school district or state.

4. Mastery of learning instruments. After instruction, students complete a test or activity to determine their level of mastery of the material covered in the behavioral objectives. These tests are called mastery of learning instruments.
5. **Subject area discipline.** When we categorize learning into specific bodies of information, we call the categories "subject areas" or "disciplines." We call a branch of knowledge such as mathematics, physics, economics or literature a discipline. Scholars in the various fields of study still argue over what constitutes a discipline and when new knowledge becomes a discipline. Thomas Kuhn (1970) wrote an important early study on the nature of scientific revolution and the reformation or what constitutes the knowledge of a discipline. Kuhn called a scientific revolution a "paradigm shift." That is a "constellation" of values, beliefs and methodological assumptions, whether implicit or explicit, inscribed in a larger world-view. A paradigm shift is a gradual change that leads to a crisis and eventual dissolution or rupture of a dominant scientific world-view (i.e., the world is flat, the Earth is the center of the universe). Kuhn observes that throughout the history of the sciences there have been paradigm shifts that have led to a discontinuous change provoked by altogether new assumptions and theories. What paradigm shifts do you see occurring as we begin a new century? How are our worldview and cosmology changing as we begin the twenty-first century? For us curriculum has undergone the paradigm shift we describe in this chapter.

6. **Course of study syllabus.** Teachers will often be asked to write a short overview of the philosophy, objectives, evaluation procedures and reading assignments for every class they teach in the curriculum. This overview of the course of study is called a syllabus. In some schools a committee of teachers from the same grade level or department prepares each syllabus.

7. **Textbooks.** The choice of textbooks in the school district always shapes and sometimes dictates the curriculum. The textbook publisher provides a scope and sequence chart and other ancillary materials to assist the teacher in presenting the course of study. Some districts expect their teachers simply to teach the material as outlined in the textbook. Other school districts may allow teachers to select from a variety of trade books, novels, anthologies and textbooks to supplement their approaches to the teaching and learning process. As we have seen, political, religious and financial considerations often outweigh educational concerns in the adoption of textbooks (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991). Some states, such as Texas, demand that textbooks be aligned with state-approved curricula, there the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) curriculum. Thus, many publishers offer a special edition of all books with "Texas Edition" emblazoned on the cover. Without such books the publishers would lose sales and profits in Texas. However, that means Texas students are exposed to only the state-approved curriculum.

8. **Aucillaries.** Ancillaries include such supplementary or complementary instructional materials as computer software, audio tapes or CDs, overhead transparencies, artwork, posters, trade books, manipulatives (any hands-on objects such as blocks or cubes or science equipment students use to experience a lesson tactilely), flashcards, videotapes and multimedia disks. Most teachers find these materials in short supply and must purchase them themselves or improvise. Many more classrooms are sterile and impoverished, lacking any stimulating or investigative materials.
9. **Computer-assisted curriculum.** The curriculum is sometimes presented on software that allows students to work independently or in small groups on a personal computer or at computer stations. A variety of encoded material is now available for teachers and students, including CD-ROM databases for research, multimedia stations for creating hypercard stacks for presentations, Internet bulletin boards and interest groups, academic reinforcement games, subject-area exercises and proficiency tests.

10. **Cognitive-domain objectives.** When teachers compose objectives related to the mental and cognitive dimensions of human beings and the learning process we call them “cognitive-domain objectives.” Students demonstrate cognitive abilities by applying formulas, writing essays or memorizing data.

11. **Affective-domain objectives.** When the teaching objectives relate to emotional and psychological dimensions of human beings and the learning process we call them “affective-domain objectives.” This could include such things as music appreciation, literacy creativity or scientific inquisitiveness.

12. **Psychomotor-domain objectives.** When teaching objectives relate to physical movement and kinesthetic activity in the learning process we call them “psychomotor-domain objectives.” This could include physical skills, sports, science experiments using bodily movement or classroom activities that require students to move their bodies.

Notice that all twelve of these elements of the traditional curriculum development model have one thing in common: They are all nouns. For most of the twentieth century, educators have defined the curriculum in terms of tangible things they can measure and codify. Even the affective domain of learning objectives has been defined in behaviorally observable and measurable terms. Objectivity and precision have preoccupied educators for decades. (Recall from Chapter 2 that the emphasis on scientific measurement, specialization and management in the early twentieth century heavily influenced the emerging conceptualization of schooling. Educators sought respect and acceptance as professionals; thus they imitated the understanding of knowledge prevalent in the academic community.)

Veteran educators confirm that colleges, universities and normal schools (teacher-training institutions) taught the curriculum as a process of writing lesson plans with observable and measurable behavioral objectives in the cognitive, affective or psychomotor domain of learning. All objectives were to begin with the phrase “The student will...” followed by a verb such as “write,” “recite,” “repeat,” or “demonstrate” and were to conclude with a measurable activity for testing or assessment. This has been the history of teacher training for curriculum and instruction. The context of the student as a dynamic person, the local community as a vibrant place of learning and the teacher as a unique individual with special talents to be utilized in the formation of lessons—the study of curriculum and instruction never adopted these concepts. In fact, traditional teacher training discounted these contextual elements as legitimate sources of knowledge. Just how did this understanding of curriculum and instruction originate and become so pervasive?
Historical Examples of Curriculum

Educators often hear calls for the curriculum to go "back to the basics." Generally speaking, proponents of this concept yearn for the structured, orderly classroom with a focus on reading, writing, and computation skills. Some also propose a return to sectarian Christian prayers, traditional "family values" and citizenship lessons in the curriculum. Others insist on specific "value-neutral" materials in the schools so that parents can teach values in the home. Finally, the call for "back to basics" for some also means a return to traditional Greek, Roman and European literature at the heart of the curriculum, with an emphasis on the "great books" and the Greek and Latin languages. We discussed these educational theories in Chapter 1 and referred to them as essentialism and perennialism.

When we examine the historical development of curriculum in schooling, we find that different subjects, books, and lessons take prominence at different times in the United States and in other countries. Thus, the call for "back to basics" in the curriculum raises questions not easily answered, despite the fact that those who propose a "traditional" or "basic" curriculum assume consensus on the meaning of this approach.

In Plato's ideal society, individuals received an education that matched their assigned social roles. Early education for children ages six through eighteen included music and gymnastics. But "music" included the areas of letters, reading, writing, moral reading and dancing. Later Plato's students received instruction in the liberal arts, censored so as to emphasize poems and stories epitomizing obedience to authority, truthfulness, courage and emotional control. Many authorities ascribe to Plato's philosophy today. Former U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett (1987, 1995) has become an outspoken proponent of classics in the curriculum, and has carefully selected, edited, and even revised the stories in his best-selling Book of Virtues to reflect the political and moral values he promotes for all American children. Over his loud calls for morality and values, it can be difficult for the casual reader to detect the political manipulation behind Bennett's work.

When we examine two of William Bennett's books, The James Madison High School (1987) and The James Madison Elementary School (1988), we find an overview of his ideal curriculum for all American students. He outlines both the exact classes he believes all students should take and a description of precisely what should be included in their lesson plans. In high school, for example, Bennett calls for four years of English, three years of math, two years of a foreign language, three years of social studies, three years of science, two years of physical education, and one semester each of art history and music history. Electives would complete the schedule. This may seem to many a logical plan, but closer examination reveals several problems with Bennett's curriculum.

The four-year English curriculum includes introduction to literature, American literature, British literature and world literature. Here is Bennett's proposal for tenth-grade American literature:
Students read a careful selection of American fiction, drama, and poetry. A good syllabus designed to spotlight that distinctive American achievement in literature might include Franklin, Irving, Hawthorne, Poe, Whitman, Twain, Melville, Dickinson, Faulkner, Wharton, Hemingway, O'Neill, Fitzgerald, From, Ralph Ellison, and Robert Penn Warren. Regular writing assignments are made and continued emphasis is placed on clarity, precision, and frequent revision. Students are given increasing experience in classroom speaking. (1987, p. 13)

Bennett outlines the major authors to be included in the American literature curriculum. Why are there only two women on the list? Why only one black? Where are the Hispanics? Where are the voices of Native Americans? Where are the transcendentalists, and why does Bennett exclude the giants Thoreau and Emerson? It happens that the political views of the transcendentalists conflict with the conservative politics of William Bennett. Might this explain the oversight? Conten porary African American authors such as Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, Ernest Gaines, Toni Morrison and Alice Walker are absent from Bennett's curriculum because he is committed to a view of the classics as a time-honored tradition—a tradition formed by those with the power and influence to create it. Even if this were true, why does Bennett exclude black intellectuals and artists of the Harlem Renaissance? Author Jonathan Kozol often writes about this problem.

Kozol (1967) published his first book, Death at an Early Age, as a result of his experiences as a beginning language teacher among disadvantaged African American children in Boston's public schools. Kozol told the story of his frustration with dilapidated facilities, overcrowded classrooms and outdated textbooks. None of the authors William Bennett recommends in American literature reflect the contextual experiences of the students Kozol taught. Moreover, there were not enough books to go around, and the books that were available were damaged and missing pages.

Browsing through a Boston bookstore one day, Kozol caught sight of a collection of poems with a picture of an African American poet on the cover. He purchased the book for his class. He wanted to show the students what a new book looked like, and he also wanted them to see that black poets exist, since none were represented in their textbooks. Kozol found himself fired by the school district for "curricular deviation," having read Langston Hughes's poem that asked "What happens to a dream deferred? Does it shiver like a raisin in the sun? ... or does it explode?" Kozol related how one particularly angry young woman who had resisted him throughout the course asked to borrow the book and memorized the poem. The poetry of Langston Hughes transformed the students and Kozol's classroom, but it also disturbed the school authorities, who were afraid of what might happen if poor black children began to read "radical" poetry. Since Hughes's poetry did not appear in the curriculum guide or district syllabus, Kozol was fired. He went on, of course, to write a library of inspiring books about such topics as the lack of education for the children of the homeless and migrant workers, the politics of literacy in the United States and the "savage" economic inequalities of American schooling. The works of Jonathan Kozol remind us that
curriculum is hardly a politically neutral activity. William Bennett’s curriculum ignores the importance of multicultural literature, the contextual experiences of students and teachers and the political consequences of censoring and editing the curriculum.

Supporters of Bennett’s curriculum might respond that he manages to include world literature in the senior year of high school. But take a careful look at the works he recommends:

A good syllabus might include a small number of works by authors from classical Greece and Rome (Sophocles and Virgil); a more generous selection from noted authors of Europe and Russia (Dante, Cervantes, Molière, Balzac, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Zola, Mann, and Ibsen); and depending on the instructor’s knowledge and interests, a small number of works from Japan, China, the Near East, Africa, and Latin America. (1986, p. 13, emphasis added)

Bennett reduces world literature to a limited canon of works from Greece, Rome and Europe; a strong bias toward Western culture is clearly visible. Bennett tosses a bone to world literature by including “a small number” of works from all of the Eastern and Southern Hemisphere cultures. His narrow worldview and political ideology permeate—we might say “infect”—his curriculum. It seems a bit naive to assume teachers who have been exposed to only a classical curriculum have “knowledge and interest” in literature from Japan, China, Africa or Latin America. But Bennett is not naive. He designed his curriculum to accomplish definite political ends, with the suppression of diversity, human experience and the contextualization of schooling. We should examine closely efforts by William Bennett and others who call for a return to a classical curriculum and expose the damage they would inflict on our students (Courts, 1997).

We can see some of this damage in a second example from The James Madison High School. In the introduction Bennett congratulates three states for having attained the ideal curriculum: “These standards [basic academic subjects] were endorsed by President Reagan, and they have since served as an important national goal. Since 1983, nearly all of the 50 states have made progress toward this goal, and three—Florida, Louisiana, and Pennsylvania—have attained it” (p. 2). A colleague of ours who was a principal in Louisiana when he read Bennett’s statement recalls his response:

I was amazed that my state—a state consistently at the bottom of every educational and economic indicator—was being praised for having attained the ideal curriculum. This was an absurdity that contradicted all my twenty years as a Louisiana educator. I was compelled to investigate the contradiction.

I discovered that Bennett based his praise for the Louisiana curriculum on legislation that required the completion of the basic courses be recommended. In particular, Louisiana had recently enacted legislation requiring all students to pass Algebra I in order to graduate high school. But Louisiana schools were in turmoil over this issue. The high school dropout rate—already near 40 percent—began to increase as students found themselves unable to complete the ideal cur-
curriculum. Math teachers met frustration as they attempted to force Algebra 1 studies on students who were incapable of or unprepared for algebra. Therefore, many teachers simply taught consumer math, business math, computation or other math skills and called the class “Algebra 1.” It was a frustrating situation for everyone involved, but at least Louisiana now offered the ideal American curriculum.

How did we reach the point at which curriculum issues have become so controversial, political and frustrating? The roots of the current curriculum debates can be found in our dependence on an approach to curriculum planning called the “Tylerian Rationale.”

THE TYLERIAN RATIONALE

Professor Ralph W. Tyler of the University of Chicago in 1949 published a book entitled Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction that proposed four elements of curriculum: goals and objectives, lessons and instructional plans, organization of learning experiences and evaluation of lessons. Since labeled the “Tylerian Rationale,” this formulation has shaped the definition of curriculum for half a century. Ralph Tyler proposed four central questions related to each element of curriculum planning that should guide the curriculum and instruction process:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain (what are its “ends” or goals or objectives)?
2. How can learning experiences be selected that are likely to be useful in attaining these objectives (lesson plans)?
3. How can meaningful learning experiences be organized for effective instruction (scope and sequence guides)?
4. How can the effectiveness of learning experiences be evaluated (tests)?

Preservice teachers usually hear a lot about the four elements of the traditional Tylerian Rationale of curriculum and instruction—possibly more than they would like. Many university education schools continue to emphasize the development of goals and objectives, formal lesson plans, scope and sequence materials and measurable evaluation and testing instruments. They assume that one can determine ends and goals in advance and then implement uniform procedures according to the lessons teachers and other experts draw up. We call this assumption about goals and objectives “overt,” “explicit” or “stated curriculum” (Eisner, 1994) because school districts and educators write and distribute it before implementing the lesson or unit to study. The written behavioral objectives state exactly what the students will study and learn in every classroom before the lessons begin.

The explicit curriculum assumes that the stated objectives will be taught and students will memorize, analyze, understand and apply the information presented. Over the past century educators have spent unimaginable amounts of time and energy writing explicit curriculum and instruction materials and lessons. Schools and classrooms overflow with volumes of these materials. In fact, the education library or instructional media center at your university probably swells with samples of
textbooks, curriculum guides, teacher manuals and state department curriculum guides with these explicit (or overt) curriculum materials you will be assumed (or expected) to use each day.

We take exception to this definition and understanding of curriculum and instruction, and we will explain shortly why we reject an understanding of curriculum limited to overt behavioral objectives. To start with, it is no longer the universally accepted definition. In fact, the concept of the curriculum is far more complex than the simple overview we have presented thus far. Briefly, we resist defining the goals, objectives and ends of education in advance and outside of the context of each student, teacher, classroom and local community. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. We should first discuss two other important dimensions of curriculum and instruction: the hidden curriculum and the null curriculum.

**THE HIDDEN OR UNSTATED CURRICULUM**

Many scholars in recent years have challenged the idea that the explicit curriculum is the only important dimension of the schooling process, and they insist that the discrete parcels of information and knowledge schools present for categorization and memorization and recitation are only one small part of the curriculum. In short, they find a “hidden curriculum” behind the explicit curriculum. For example, Apple (1979) suggested that schools and classrooms socialize students to the values that are a part of the culture of the school and society. More specifically, Jackson (1968, 1992) noticed that the current structure of classrooms, with large numbers of students, socializes those students to delay gratification and sharing of their successes because teachers cannot satisfy all the needs of all the children simultaneously. Many of these critics of the explicit curriculum also contend that schools foster compliant behavior rather than cultivate initiative, as they generally claim to do.

The hidden curriculum often works like a subliminal message. Advertisers create subliminal (below the threshold of consciousness) messages to sell their products. Scantily clad women fall from the sky in beer commercials; muscular men promote exercise equipment and cigarettes. Sex, images of presumed beauty or promises of wealth and happiness sell products. Some merchants use subliminal messages to discourage shoplifting. Inaudible voices announce under the soft music that “shoplifters will be prosecuted.” Until the practice was banned in the 1960s, movie theaters would insert and flash film frames of popcorn or sodas to lure viewers to the concession stand. These frames flashed so quickly to register overtly with the viewer; thus they were subliminal or hidden.

Some elements of the curriculum operate in exactly the same way, practices that have gone unchallenged until recently. For example, a high school civics teacher who is committed to the Tylarian Rationale plans a unit on the Bill of Rights. In her lesson plan she introduces the first ten amendments to the Constitution, presents an overview of each amendment, discusses examples of legal cases related to each amendment, shows a film about the history of the Bill of Rights
and prepares notes for the students that outline the information in the textbook. She presents a well-prepared lesson in a traditional format.

As the teacher starts the lesson, her thirty students sit quietly in six rows facing the blackboard. In the middle of the introduction on the first day of class, one student raises his hand. The teacher calls on him and he says, “I don’t agree with the Bill of Rights. We do not have rights in this country. The government controls everything.” This particular bright student has challenged the teacher all year, and frankly, she is sick and tired of his constant interruptions. She responds, “This is not the time for comments. After we study the amendments and understand their purpose, then we can discuss examples.”

The persistent student raises his hand again: “Look, you say that we have freedom of expression and freedom of speech in this country. The school newspaper wouldn’t print my article last week because they said it was too controversial to interview pregnant girls on campus.”

This time the teacher interrupts the student. She is furious that he constantly tries to challenge her, and she is particularly disturbed that he would bring up such a sensitive issue as pregnancy. She raises her voice and scolds him: “You are constantly interrupting the class. Our lesson calls for learning the Bill of Rights today. Put your hand down and write the notes. You will have a test on Friday and a proficiency exam later this year in which you will have to name the first ten amendments and discuss how they protect our freedoms. Now be quiet and get busy.”

This scenario recurs every day. Teachers demand that students learn information using a methodology that contradicts the very premise of the lesson. In this case, the annoying student may memorize the fact that the Bill of Rights guarantees freedom of speech. But he has actually learned that there is no freedom of speech, no opportunity to discuss controversial subjects and no forum for challenging concepts presented in textbooks or lesson plans. Many authors, including Eisner (1994) and Apple (1979), argue that the hidden curriculum is actually more influential in the learning process than the explicit curriculum. That is what students really remember.

We have observed many civics classes like the one just described, and so, no doubt, have you. Conservative critics such as Chester Finn (1991) and books such as Civitas (Bahmueler, 1991) recommend more civics in the classroom. They want to be sure students know the facts about American government and history so they will participate in the democratic process. These critics expect more rigorous civics classes to improve our democracy. They cite low voter turnout, voter apathy, a general reluctance to participate and declining trust in the government as reasons for teaching a more rigorous civics program. They also propose a proficiency test to make sure that all students know the facts about the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the branches of government and American history.

Accustomed to the traditional teaching and learning methodologies, some students may indeed memorize the information for the test, but all of them will continue to learn the reality of American government from the hidden curriculum while the learned critics wonder why American citizens do not vote and remain
dissatisfied. It is not simply because we sometimes fail to teach the facts about government; it is because the hidden curriculum conditions students to distrust their government.

Meanwhile, those who are most vocal about training students with the traditional methodologies actually raise a sort of smokescreen. They want to protect their status quo privilege and train the next generation to accept the values of the culture and government without question. The hidden curriculum is at the very least a subconscious communication of values, ideas, and social realities within the schooling community; at worst it is a conscious effort on the part of some teachers, politicians, and educational bureaucrats to perpetuate injustice and retain the prevailing social arrangements using the subliminal programming Madison Avenue advertisers employ.

**The Null Curriculum**

The “null curriculum” refers to what gets left out of the curriculum—those authors, ideas, topics, and issues that go undiscussed. As a teacher you will face decisions in curriculum planning about the inclusion or exclusion of material. As you come to the end of a hectic year, what chapters will you skip? Like William Bennett’s world literature curriculum, what authors reflect your own knowledge and interests? How much time will you allocate to each topic, chapter, or book? What issues are too controversial to discuss: HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, religion, politics, race, gender? What books are banned? What well-known books are absent from the school library or forbidden outright? For example, some teachers worry that if they discuss the topic of racism, civil rights, the Civil War, the Million Man March, the Ku Klux Klan, reconstruction in the south, genetics, interracial dating at the prom, or some other topic remotely related to race parents will complain or a not will break out in the school. Therefore, many school districts and teachers ignore or gloss over these controversial topics, which is the null curriculum in action.

At one Alabama school in 1994, the principal threatened to cancel the prom when he heard that a black and a white student planned to attend the dance as a couple. One mixed-race student then asked the principal who she could date. The principal reportedly replied that she was a “mistake” and represented the evil consequences of interracial dating. Later in the year the school building burned to the ground and the principal was removed from his position.

This episode suggests, among other things, that attempts to silence people by forbidding discussion of controversial topics and prohibiting freedom of ideas and association can be explosive. Nevertheless, the null curriculum remains pervasive and oppressive. As we saw in Part 3, textbook companies avoid controversial topics in order to appeal to the widest possible audience. Students suffer when they receive incomplete information as a result of the belief that silence protects them from suffering. Jonathan Sirlin (1995) wrote an insightful book, *Sex, Death, and Children: Our Passion for Ignorance in the Age of AIDS*, in which he documents
the devastating consequences of remaining silent in the age of AIDS. The null curriculum hardly protects children: an insistence upon silence handicaps children, and when the suppressed information involves AIDS, it can kill them.

A colleague of ours once supervised a student teacher in a rural Louisiana school district. During our colleague’s first visit to the classroom in early February, she observed a lesson on the Bush administration in the social studies class. After discussing the lesson with the student teacher and wondering why they were studying contemporary American history, our colleague asked the supervising teacher about the syllabus. The master teacher explained, “When I first started teaching here twenty years ago during integration, we decided to start the United States history classes at 1900 and move to the present. Then we go back to the early explorers and work our way to the 1840s. We are about halfway through the curriculum right now.”

The student teacher noticed, of course, that the curriculum omitted the years between 1840 and 1900. She told the teacher that the historian Shelby Foote, who had narrated a PBS series on the Civil War, considered the Civil War period the most significant time in American history because everything before 1860 established the context for the war and everything after the war involved attempts to deal with its consequences. “How could the Civil War be excluded from the curriculum?” she inquired.

The supervising teacher replied that it was too controversial to discuss these issues in the community. Nevertheless, she did tell her he regretted the fact that he could not teach the Civil War: “The Civil War period is my favorite. I have been teaching United States history for twenty years, and I have never been able to cover that period.”

It happened that this supervising teacher was the only high school U.S. history teacher in that rural district. Thus, the entire Civil War had been relegated to the null curriculum for all of the citizens of this community for two decades. It also happened that race relations in this rural community were unusually tense. Could one trace those tensions to the null curriculum in the schools? We think so. Like the hidden curriculum, the null curriculum has a greater impact on students than the overt curriculum. The null curriculum and the hidden curriculum affect students forever; whereas students often forget the overt curriculum shortly after they complete their proficiency tests (Goodson, 1997).

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**Reconceptualizing Teaching and Learning**

Recent studies of the curriculum challenge traditional Tylerian assumptions and begin to reconceptualize the curriculum. A book by Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (1995) entitled *Understanding Curriculum* proposes that the curriculum is not a scope and sequence chart or a list of objectives but rather a process, a journey toward becoming during which all life experiences are valued for their potential to inform and inspire learning. This process affirms important dimensions
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of curriculum often overlooked in the traditional model: the relational dimension of learning in communities, the autobiographical stories of teachers and students, subjective interpretations and personal insights, the sociocultural environment of education, multicultural and political concerns and theological dimensions of the learning milieu. Our understanding of curriculum must no longer remain separated into discrete subjects to be studied and memorized. Rather, the curriculum must be an interdisciplinary experience that unites learning with the community in a process of growth for each individual on the journey to becoming a more insightful, just, committed and involved member of the human community. In the reconceptualized curriculum, community involvement is hardly a peripheral issue; the community context is necessary for learning environments to exist.

A RECONCEPTUALIZED LESSON

A graduate student in one of our classes in Ohio who studied the concepts of curriculum presented in this chapter appreciated our perspective, but she could not imagine implementing reconceptualized visions of the curriculum in her school. Her principal demanded daily lesson plans with specific outcomes outlined in the curriculum guide. The district administered proficiency tests in math, reading, science and English. Her tenure and promotion depended on how well her students performed on these tests. Her very pay scale followed a merit system that rewarded compliance with the traditional curriculum program. She resented the environment she created in her classroom, but she saw no realistic chance to deviate. Further, her students behaved so disruptively and their participation was so sporadic that she doubted they would accept a contextual and experiential curriculum. In short, she considered our curriculum philosophy too idealistic and impractical. For her final course project, however, she explored the possibilities of a student-centered experiential curriculum.

Because her district did not test social studies, and because most teachers skipped the thirty-minute social studies block to spend more time on the “important” subjects, our student decided to experiment with her relatively safe social studies curriculum. She videotaped her lessons for a two-week unit on deserts and then shared the video with us. Instead of writing lesson plans in advance with specific objectives and evaluation requirements, she introduced the lesson with this simple statement: “Today we begin our next unit in social studies. Our topic is deserts.” Bored and distracted faces appeared on the video. A few took notes. Most sat silently waiting for instructions. Then she dropped her bombshell: “I don’t know very much about deserts. I have never been to a desert. We are going to have to figure out how to learn about deserts together.”

Immediately one student raised his hand. “I went to a desert in California last summer.” He described his trip enthusiastically, but he struggled to remember the name of the desert. Another student suggested that they look at a map and find its name. The class moved to the map. Another student pointed to Africa and said
that her father once went hunting on a safari. "What's a safari?" another student asked. The class consulted the dictionary to find the answer.

Over the next few days, the students decided to divide themselves into groups to investigate deserts. One group selected animals of the deserts. They made a small-scale model of a desert and a safari. Another group made maps of the various deserts of the world. Other groups investigated plant life, human habitation and survival.

The teacher, our graduate student, reported that she had never seen such enthusiasm for a unit of study in her career. Students who formerly presented severe behavior problems emerged as group leaders. Another group of students went to the library every day at recess to find more information about their topics. The maps and models of deserts were displayed in the corridor and caught the attention of other students. Our student was convinced of the power of our reconceptualized curriculum when she completed this experimental project. We suspect that she will find ways to resist a steady dose of the traditional approach to curriculum and instruction in the future.

A SCHOOLWIDE EXAMPLE OF INTERDISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM

As an example of this philosophy of curriculum in practice, consider an interdisciplinary curriculum program at an elementary school in Louisiana that incorporates some of the best elements of the emerging understandings of curriculum. This school undertook a museum project to provide educational experiences that draw on and support the entire community: school, university, benefactors, teachers, students, alumni, churches, school and parish boards, students in other schools—even tourists.

The school is located adjacent to the historic property of a prominent cathedral. The grounds include the 450-year-old vice president of the national Live Oak Society (only trees can be members), the town's first cemetery and the former bishop's home. The school grounds are located within a few blocks of the local university. In 1992 the church vacated an office building adjacent to the cathedral, and the school had a chance to use the space. Its faculty decided to dedicate part of the space to a new museum featuring the local history of the school, church, cemetery, oak tree and prominent citizens buried in the cemetery.

With the encouragement and guidance of several teachers, junior high students volunteered to collect artifacts to be displayed in the museum. They also learned to serve as tour guides in the museum, applying lessons from their daily French classes to speak with tourists from Quebec and France. They interviewed relatives of several people buried in the cemetery, including descendants of the founder of the original settlement in 1821, a Civil War general, an American ambassador to France and others. A museum board was formed.

The students and teachers also collaborated with a professional filmmaker to create a videotape for tourists to view as they arrived on the property. At various
times during the year the students conducted tours of the property for tourists, Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops and visitors from other schools.

This museum project provided students with leadership opportunities, and it established historical links for future generations. Everyone in the community benefited from this curricular innovation: Students found themselves immersed in local history. The school and church strengthened their mutual bonds while publicly displaying their common heritage. Teachers and club leaders now enjoy a convenient site for field trips, family outings and discussion sessions, and the school alumni have a visible reminder of their school and community heritage.

The local university also became involved in the creation of the museum, loaning several artifacts from its special library collection. A professor of history and several graduate students in social studies education provided information for the video script.

But how might this special, one-time museum project be a model for total community education? First and most obvious, the inclusive nature of the collaborative enterprise benefited all the participants. Church, school, university and local citizens all provided materials, information and advice. Second, the students had leadership roles, providing meaningful decision making, making creative suggestions and taking responsibility. Third, focusing attention on the historical roots of the school, community and cemetery provided alumni, grandparents and benefactors a focus for renewing their connections to the community.

**Education as a Life-Long Process**

Education is a life-long process that includes a variety of experiences: formal programs, informal activities, learning exercises, cooperative ventures, informative presentations, spiritual revelations, psychological discoveries and personal relationships. Education transcends singular definitions; it is an ongoing process of becoming that includes the emotional, physical and relational dimensions of life.

Meanwhile, the institutionalization of education as schooling has become a complex phenomenon with a rich but tortuous history that includes both successes and failures. As we have seen, many people have acquired a personal interest and investment in formal schooling. But the ability of schooling to further the educative process while promoting a just and sustainable global community directly relates to the ability of all those education affects to cooperate, share resources, listen with empathy, accept differences, remain open to possibilities and understand history. This vision is essential to the emergence of the holistic curriculum and instruction process we propose. Local projects like the museum curriculum suggest that it can be done.

The cooperative community milieu we just described is too often the exception rather than the rule. We have all seen the divisiveness that exists in so many institutions. Various school departments and programs fight with each other for limited funding or recognition. Boards of education, school committees, administrators and teachers bicker over funding or program implementation. The allocation of facilities and resources often generates distrust and anger. Dis-
agreements about the educational process result in feuds and threats. In other words, the current curriculum reflects in a microcosm the problems of the larger society.

**Curren**

Recall from Chapter 9 that the word “curriculum” derives from the Latin verb *currere*, which means “to run the racecourse.” Yet, as we noted earlier, the modern school curriculum has reduced the curriculum to a noun, “the course.” We have forgotten that curriculum is an active process; it is not the lesson plan, the scope and sequence chart, the mastery test, the goals and objectives or the textbook. The curriculum is an integrated experience of living the journey toward becoming a whole person—emotionally, physically, psychologically, spiritually and socially. The curriculum never ends; it is always ongoing and tentative.

This simple concept is apparently difficult for many to understand. Ever since the Enlightenment and the development of philosophies that polarized reality, individuals have been busily fragmenting all elements of life. An atmosphere of holistic education offers an opportunity to reconceptualize (“reverse” is the impolite word) this modern obsession with fragmentation and specialization.

The current school curriculum reflects this separatist ideology in many ways. For example, the learning process is artificially divided into school subjects taught without any connection to the other subjects. Math and science get special priority—as we saw in the discussion of the *Goals 2000* document in Chapter 1—and the arts and humanities become the first casualties of budget cuts and scheduling conflicts. Spelling and punctuation become the dominion of language arts specialists. The school schedule and social culture revolve around a few popular or dominant activities such as a sport, a club or a social event.

Thus, severe fragmentation too often characterizes the school curriculum. Despite efforts to integrate the curriculum through team teaching, modular schedules, interdisciplinary units, writing across the curriculum and cooperative programs, education too often remains driven by preplanned goals and objectives, disciplinary units, lectures, memorization and standardized tests. With continued specialization and new standards in every field of study, teachers are actually becoming more isolated from each other and from subjects beyond their areas of specialization.

We have met Algebra I teachers who are uncomfortable discussing math with calculus teachers, much less writing across the curriculum with English teachers. We have heard teachers in the earliest grades request greater departmentalization. Kindergarten programs that focus on child-centered needs are becoming the exception instead of the rule. More tests and proficiency exams intrude on the schooling process every year. Faculty members and students under extreme time pressures feel overwhelmed by the amount of material they have to cover. The traditional school schedule, with numerous bells and short periods, frustrates many teachers.

We contend that much of this pressure arises from the fragmentation we see in the schools. In response, we must break down the barriers that divide math from
English, art from science, physical education from academic education, administration from faculty, school from district; parents from teachers and teachers from students. We must find a way to stop thinking and acting in terms of “us and them,” or worse, “us versus them.” Only when an integrated vision or living in a just and sustainable community emerges can we reconceptualize the curriculum and instruction.

**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Is history a progressive series of distinctly separate and chronological events on a linear timeline or is it a procession of interrelated occasions with the past and future embedded in the present moment? The first perspective implies a commitment to objective analysis and categorization of discrete parcels of information that become quantifiable objects of study. From this perspective, an historian attempts to explain events logically according to a narrative of human progress through the centuries.

The second perspective (which we discussed in Chapter 9) implies a commitment to ongoing reinterpretation, the primacy of subjective experience, the interpenetration of meaning and context, the social construction of knowledge and the interdependence of events within a time and a place. In short, we can understand history either as events separated by time and space or as the integral interrelationship of events unified with time and space.

Logical positivists and analytic philosophers generally ascribe to the first perspective, as we noted in Chapter 2. Either these philosophers ignore historical analysis because of the subjectivity inherent in the interconnectedness of contextual realities or they objectively and segment history to control reality so that events conform within the paradigm of modernity. Many contemporary curriculum scholars challenge the assumption that historical interpretation should work to validate the knowledge and values of the dominant modern paradigm. Contemporary curriculum studies celebrate the eclectic, innovative, revisionist, ironic and subjective dimensions of historical interpretation.

Our reconceptualized curriculum development model challenges the traditional approach modern logical positivists take to the study of history as a linear timeline of events. It encourages autobiographical reflection, narrative inquiry, revisionist interpretation and contextual understanding so that we can understand knowledge as reflecting socially constructed human interests, values and actions. Herbert Kliebard explains:

> We often make half-conscious decisions as to what knowledge is most appropriate to include in the curriculum then afterwards devise the plausible-sounding reasons for so deciding. Those half-conscious decisions are tied in many instances to such matters as social class allegiances and to self-interest generally. As such, curriculum history is no so much involved with traditional epistemological questions as with questions closely associated with the sociology of knowledge. The history of the curriculum is, in other words, critically concerned with what is taken to be knowledge in certain times and places rather than what is ultimately true or
valid. . . . A fundamental question embedded in the history of curriculum, then, is not simply one of who went to school and who did not, but the way in which the social machinery may be constructed to differentiate access to certain forms of knowledge. (This difference is) significant not just in a pedagogical sense but in terms of status attainment and social relations, if not social justice. (1992, p. 158)

In effect, the curriculum must seek to understand and inculcate history contextually rather than delineate a coherent analysis of selective events and artifacts. Just as the curriculum is affected by social conditions and values, so can it help re-shape or preserve those conditions and values. The relationship between society and the curriculum, in other words, is reciprocal.

Contemporary curriculum discourses assume history to be contextual, multidimensional, ironic, contingent, evolving and personal. Educators can no longer simply “teach” history. Because the autobiographical, local and particular are essential to an understanding of history, teachers must now listen to students and their life stories. As feminist scholars insist, history is not just “his story”—that is, the master narratives of Anglo-Saxon, European, Protestant, heterosexual, male warriors. Rather, “her story” is also integral to history.

This participatory view of history is what Jonathan Kozol proposed for social studies classrooms. Kozol argues against schooling that is not transformative and against schooling that does not participate in history:

School teaches history in the same way that it teaches syntax, grammar, and word-preference: in terms that guarantee our prior exile from its passion and its transformation. It lifts up children from the present, denies them powerful access to the future, and vols them of all ethical repossessions of the past. History is, as the sarcastic student says, an X-rated film. The trouble is that everyone we know, love, touch, hold, dream to be, or ever might become, has just to be told: I cannot enter. (1975, p. 83)

We must, therefore, keep history from becoming a series of events to be memorized, and make it an opportunity to inform the present and provide access to the future. Kozol challenges educators to adopt a transformative pedagogy in order to recover a participative mode in history education.

Another contrast between the modern and our critical constructive postmodern view of the function of the social studies curriculum is portrayed in a familiar classroom poster headed “Occupations to Which Interest in History May Lead.” The poster lists archeologist, curator, writer, critic, archivist, anthropologist, librarian and teacher. Nowhere does this list suggest the possible goal of becoming someone who “enters history.” The curriculum must challenge both teachers and students to enter into the historical process as participants rather than as observers.

Our schools have recently experienced a flood of textbooks and curriculum materials that promote “critical thinking.” We would normally welcome this trend, but close examination of these critical thinking materials reveals that some of them establish boundaries around thinking and actually limit the parameters of
knowledge by offering specific interpretations of human history. Luckily some educators go further, encouraging freedom of interpretation from an existential perspective. The resulting conflict centers on the question of whether English and social studies teachers, for example, should encourage or even allow their students to offer subjective interpretations of literature and history, or whether critical thinking should be directed toward a range of legitimate interpretations scholarly authorities have already established. Curriculum historians today insist that theories and narratives simply cannot present politically, theoretically, racially, gendered and culturally neutral perspectives. History, like knowledge, is socially and culturally constructed. We are convinced that the curriculum today must include more eclectic and subjective understandings of interpretation and critical thinking, even though traditional Tocqueville modernists will denounce us as heretics. For example, Civitas (Baehmueller, 1991), a new national framework for civics education mentioned earlier, issued this warning:

*Citizenship training, if it means anything at all, means teaching students to think critically, listen with discernment, and communicate with power and precision. If students learn to listen, read, speak, and write more carefully, they will not only be critically empowered, but also they will know how to distinguish between the authentic and the fraudulent in human discourse.... Civic education for a new century also must provide students with a core of basic knowledge about social issues and institutions, to allow them to put their understanding of democracy into perspective. (1991, p. xvi)*

Like other conservative calls for cultural literacy, core knowledge and a fact-based curriculum, Civitas is concerned with teaching basic information so students can make informed decisions that protect the current political and social arrangements and be socialized into the American political structure. The unstated assumption is that students left to their own interpretations or subjective analyses without authoritative guidance and reason will be unable to participate effectively or appropriately. The modernist approach to science and history contends that knowledge builds on itself in progressive stages. Thus, students must know an objective past before attempting to apply critical thinking in the present. Those with this perspective require us to apply the truth of past scientific discoveries and historical analysis to build new knowledge. This philosophy continues to guide the traditional approaches to the curriculum, which assume that learning takes place in sequential steps and that students must master one set of skills before proceeding to the next level of difficulty. If this assumption were true, we would delay one of the most complex dimensions of human learning, speech and language, until much later in life rather than tool ourselves into thinking that babies can learn to speak.

The contemporary curriculum challenges this outdated concept of time and linear scientific progress. Albert Einstein, who as a young man had major difficulties with formal schooling, provides a case in point. Einstein’s vision of the physical universe in his theory of relativity initiated a search for a unified foundation for physics beyond the modern worldview of Newtonian physics. Einstein’s theories