

Chapter 9

The Role of Instructional Design in Surfacing the Hidden Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the role of instructional design in relation to the hidden curriculum in higher education. It also discusses the potential and limitations of instructional design methods to make explicit different aspects of what is hidden. The hidden curriculum, both offline and online, includes important practices that should be brought to the surface and not left behind as an afterthought. The authors promote a proactive, not reactive, curriculum by arguing that the learning space should guide both formal and hidden curricula. They also urge for the reader to consider the tensions between the formal and hidden curricula in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

As instructional designers begin to design courses across their institutions it may seem that the focus is on learning outcomes, course content, material and media production, and relationships with subject matter experts (SMEs). However, instructional designers also assess learner needs that go beyond the design and development and achievement of the learning objectives. The expanded focus of the designer's role includes envisioning the path each student may take to successfully complete a course and what obstacles could potentially impede that success. A learner without a proper map may not know how to navigate properly. The obstacles faced may not necessarily be with the course design, course content, or the subject itself, it may be the literacies needed and behaviors encouraged in the completion of a course. For example, a learner may be lacking digital literacy, be unfamiliar with educational technologies, or be unprepared to communicate professionally across discussion boards. Instructional design methods have the potential to uncover what is hidden in the curriculum during the design and development process.

This chapter explores multiple definitions of a hidden curriculum that includes attributes of sociocultural, situational, and/or inherent instruction. The learner experiences the hidden curriculum through subtext. The concept of the hidden curriculum is not new, but with the evolution of educational technology in distance learning and technology enhanced courses new literacies are introduced and certain social behaviors are expected from the learner. Nonetheless, the hidden curriculum is not necessarily more advantageous or disadvantageous based on the modality of the course (Anderson, 2001), for example, online, blended/hybrid or traditional face-to-face mode. Learner backgrounds can shape the learning experience and therefore the hidden curriculum. To better prepare learners, a combination of the hidden and formal curricula is proposed.

BACKGROUND

What Is the Hidden Curriculum?

The hidden curriculum has been defined in various ways in education but primarily it is described as a sociocultural expectation that may also be a limitation to a learner. Based on the sociocultural aspect alone, the hidden curriculum is a socialization process that may be defined "as the attitudes and values conveyed, most often in an implicit and tacit fashion, sometimes unintentionally, via the educational structures,

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