

## THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

by David L. Brierley

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*"I have never let my schooling interfere with my education".*

: Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) (1835-1910) author and humorist.

Every day hundreds upon hundreds of millions of children leave their homes with satchel on back to spend most of the day in the classroom. Leaving home for school is a taken-for-granted event. We don't think about it except when something goes wrong. Waiting for them are the teachers. On their return, a mother occasionally enquires as to what what her son or daughter have done at school that particular day. Most often their off-springs are unable to answer in any understandable detail. Perhaps they can recall for the adult a somewhat insignificant event such as "We played the recorder" or "I sat next to Marina today." How can we understand the life of the classroom? Part of it is routine and that which is celebrated and the unnoticed.

The average pupil in our part of the world spends about one thousand hours in the classroom every year. A sixth of his or her life is spent at school, not including kindergarten and higher education. There are three primary activities in childhood and youth- sleeping, playing and sitting in the classroom. Apart from the bedroom (where the youngster is mostly dormant) there is no other room in which the child spends as much time as in the classroom. From seven years the child is more in company with a teacher than a father or even a mother.

The classroom is in the periphery of our awareness but at the same time provides a cornerstone of society in that it is a unrivalled place of stability in a constant social context. There is a social intimacy in the classroom that is unparalleled elsewhere in society. The ritualistic and cyclic qualities in the classroom are not to be underestimated. As such the classroom is a microcosm of the world. Classrooms are special places. At the same time this stable place is one in which things are happening all the time. It is not only a question of teaching and learning- in addition a multitude of dialogues and human interactions take place daily. But the life of the classroom is seldom understood by the casual onlooker. It provides a slice of real life. Pupils learn to work in the classroom. It provides an embedded, largely unconscious, almost invisible life. It is irrational, mystical and magical for human behaviour is multifaceted and inscrutable. Teaching is an enactment of the intermediary relations between the pupil's individuality and the world as such presented through the subject matter by the teacher. Expressions are often immediate and in a phenomenographical context they oscillate between the teacher's observation of details and social and personal reaction. In studying this world the pedagogue works towards an understanding of the unexpressed concealed in the expression or the lack of expression. In adolescence this is a shifting and complicated landscape. Facial expressions: glances, hand movements, the volume and tempo of the voice, the gait- these are all revealing signs.

Any teacher will tell you that classrooms are busy places. Even as an experienced teacher I was recently surprised to learn from one of my research students that a teacher engages in as many as one thousand interpersonal interchanges each day. A singular exchange can have the utmost significance in the life of a pupil without the teacher ever being aware of its importance.

In the classroom there is a considerable amount of variety as well as a great deal of constancy.

Thus classrooms are special places, unparalleled elsewhere in society. The pupils in them are there involuntarily. They have to be there if they like it or not., by law. Few institutions have the same status in this respect. We all know that humans are highly sensitive beings. At the same time we respect the child or youth in their quest for freedom. We need to give them sheltered, warm and enveloping surroundings. In other words we provide them with a protective environment. Today this is an increasingly central factor in education. We know of the consequences of over stimulation and that a flood of impressions will pose problems. Therefore the classroom environment needs to be filled with beautiful music, beautiful colours and beautiful paintings and drawings in order to create a warm zone, a protected room for friendliness and thoughtfulness, for interest in each other, as a buffer against today's largely cold society. It is no longer the case that we can just leave the pupils to themselves and watch as a creativity and geniality grows naturally. Our classrooms need to be havens growth.

When the bystander or onlooker peeps into the micro-world of the classroom he will naturally focus his attention on the teaching of the subjects. This part of teaching is outward bound and through it we learn to know the world. There is, however, an inward reality that is just as important in any path to knowledge. Without these imponderable elements there will be a certain clinical detachment that cuts off the personalized attachment to knowledge and practical ability. The classroom is an integral part of the reality of life. The relation between 'the world outside' and 'the world inside' is the key of the kingdom of learning. We must never underestimate the importance of this inner world as the teaching behind the teaching. The main goal of education is to understand the self in the world. Knowing is where the subjective and the objective meet. Some people think that facts are passionless, they dismiss the idea that knowledge has its own morality, that knowledge has its place in the human soul. It is timely to remember that throughout history we have had two motives that have led to the acquisition of knowledge: control and curiosity. Human beings are inquisitive by nature but at the same time want to use knowledge to control their surroundings and each other. A one-sidedness of this duality can lead to the dearth of personalized knowledge as such. However, there is a third source of knowledge that is growing in significance more important by the day in our technological civilization.. This form of knowledge is not based on curiosity or control but is equally as comprehensive It is founded on compassion, on love, and has its roots not in our intellectual academic traditions but in our spiritual heritage. The future will not bring about questions of exploitation and manipulation of our world but the need for reconciliation, that embraces both 'inner' and 'outer' realities. The act of knowing is an act of love. Knowing is loving, to use Dostoevsky's expression: 'Love becomes action.'

At the same time despite all the lesson planning beforehand teaching is an opportunist process. Neither the teacher nor the pupils can foresee what will happen next. Plans are adjusted constantly and unexpected opportunities for attainment arise all the time. The teacher seizes on these and he has to learn to have faith in what he thinks and feels and that his ideas are appropriate here and now. Therefore any curriculum should not take the form of a legal document but a plan towards a possible realization of a spiritual potential.

**Pupils are experts on teachers. They watch the body language, they listen to the tone of the voice. They scrutinize, they judge but never discuss their findings. They absorb it all. The teacher is a psychologist, a policeman, a philosopher, an orator, a lawyer, a secretary, a judge, a sociologist, a counsellor, a sergeant major, an artist, a scientist, a father, a mother, an uncle, an aunt, a shoulder to cry on and a sheepdog.**

**After school the teacher goes directly home with his briefcase and a plastic bag full of exercise books. There are books to be marked and lessons to be prepared. That's the life of the teacher. They don't go out- perhaps at the weekend. They eat their dinner, put the children to bed, then it's time to start. Perhaps time for a coffee with their partner first? At eleven it's time for a quick look at the newspaper- and so to bed.**

**What will tomorrow be like? The teacher thinks of her pupils and about the events of the last day. She then drifts off to sleep. But she's with her pupils all the time.**

**They're a conscientious lot these teachers. They have to find their way in the classroom and they have to find themselves. Politicians, lawyers, actors, television people, doctors get their recognition, they're important people.**

**The above account is only a slice of a microcism of seven pupils in a class of twenty-six. It tells of a microcism of episodes in a very short space of time..**

It's a long road to pedagogy- it takes a long time to become experts in people's futures. A talent is formed in stillness. The teacher hardly ever sees the results of his or her work. However I have learnt through the years that creative freedom is the secret to happiness. The heart's creative wisdom is in every one of us and it is my task as a teacher to attempt to liberate this both in my pupils and in myself. Nothing can compensate from not trying to accomplish this vision through passionate creative work. After all, a work of art is never finished . .

In his treatise 'On the Shortness of Life, Life is Long if You Know How to Use it', Seneca quotes Hippocrates' hypothesis that "Life is short, art is long." Seneca, who was born about 59 B.C. in Cordoba, philosophises about the quality of life. He tells us that "many pursue no fixed goal but are tossed about in ever-changing designs by a fickleness which is shifting, inconstant and never satisfied with itself. Some have no aims at all for their life's course." He continues, " Vices surround and assail men from every side, and do not allow them to rise again and lift their eyes to discern the truth, but keep them overwhelmed and rooted in their desires. Never can they recover their true selves."

"If by chance they achieve some tranquillity, just as a swell remains on the deep sea even after the wind has dropped, so they go on tossing about and never find rest from their desires."<sup>i</sup>

This stands for me as a description of the art of teaching. A presupposition for the inner journey of youth and that of the teacher is that we stop and eye where we are. In order to engage on a quest of this kind you first have to look for who you are, where one finds oneself

and finally where one can find the way forward. A stable personal identity is a condition for a deep collective, communal spirit. The inner journey that starts in puberty necessitates that the pupil looks out into the world and at the same time is aware of himself. Along the way there are few signposts and many warning signs.

In the classroom or workshop there are, as I see it, two main challenges for the modern teacher: *the clarification of experience* and *the establishment of self-esteem*.

Growth and upbringing depend on a continuity of meaning and a philosophical platform which is mostly lacking in society as a whole. This lack of philosophical structure I deem to be the chief obstacle in the development of a curriculum in tune with the needs of the pupil. If a school is entrusted with the task of helping the young person to define himself it must also be prepared to attack the problems of self-definition.

Self appraisal is not an easy task and comes to become a central aspect of adolescent education. We complain of living in a world in which man treats himself as a commodity. We need to start to consider how we are valuable rather than how valuable we are. This means taking a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach. We should learn what we can expect of ourselves, what we are good for as individuals, how we react with other people, how we can look through their eyes. In order to maintain our self-esteem we need to be subjective. Self-esteem does not follow any external evaluation of our worth. It is therefore very closely related to the clarification of experience. If we do not understand clearly what we have done and what has happened to us we have no basis for self-esteem. The adolescent's building of appraisal of him or herself is therefore vulnerable to the feelings and judgements expressed by the people round the teenager. He or she is, in many ways, more vulnerable than a child. An adolescent cannot easily assimilate an attack on their worth or dignity. It is not just that they feel they need to be loved or accepted, it's much much more. I feel understanding of this process is becoming obsolete. There is a conflict that is looming between the human being and the mode of maturity society is creating. In the western world there is a visible alteration in the process of personality development. We are starting to produce a new type of adult based on a new concept of maturity. The relationship between maturity on the one side and the stability of identity on the other it not as it once was. Previously a grown mature person was an individual with a well-defined personality of his own. Now there is less scope for self-direction and autonomy must therefore be redefined.

Competence as an overall aim in education is all about establishing a stable identity. By helping the adolescent to develop good and specific reasons for thinking well of himself the school can contribute greatly in bringing about a stable identity. The young people need to become competent in mind, heart and body. The pupil has to think of this competence as his or her own. The powers that are needed to realise this competence is a much wider concept than most adults realise.

School is a place where you not only learn to be a student, a writer, a scientist, a lover or a carpenter but it is also a place where you learn that you are good at it. One can. Of course, try to raise academic standards by political decision making but the patient development of character of mind will ensure that the child and adolescent will not vanish for good.

*David Brierley is an associate professor at the Rudolf Steiner University College in Oslo, a state-funded independent institution of which he was a founder in 1981. He is guest professor*

# Rudolf Steinerhøyskolen

Rudolf Steiner University College

*at several European universities primarily working with resilient methodology and applied creativity as well as working for financial and business institutions on the theme of life competence. He is also a writer having published five books on methodology in schools.*

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<sup>i</sup> Seneca: *On the Shortness of Life*. Penguin Great Ideals, Penguin Books, London 2004.