

# entertainment

Book:

## The Hidden Curriculum

By Alex Makowski

Ever since the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, educators and analysts have been seeking an explanation for the growing student discontent with their universities. Much of the anger that has erupted in years since as political action has been diagnosed as the symptom of a malaise permeating the core of America's higher education system.

MIT Dean for Institute Relations Benson Snyder may well have discovered the key to properly appraising the developing mood on campus. *The Hidden Curriculum* is his penetrating exposition and analysis of the factors underlying current student (and faculty) dissatisfaction.

### Soul-searching

With wide circulation, his book could spark some useful soul-searching by MIT faculty members, introspection that would be a valuable beginning to rooting out some of the deficiencies of education here. For it is Snyder's basic thesis that a hidden curriculum exists that supplements and often overshadows the formal curriculum of required courses and catalogue information. This second set of standards includes prevailing faculty attitudes about the role of education (do we turn out daring thinkers or merely competent technicians?), patterns of the reward and grade system (do test marks measure creativity or gamesmanship?), the work expected of students, the academic and scholarly environment (do the faculty associate with and respect their peers in other fields?), Institute rules for social conduct, and the sum total of pressures from the outside world.

Snyder's early and mid 1960's studies of students at MIT, other local schools, and scattered universities across the country and the world convinced him that all too often the hidden curriculum becomes the basis for a student's self-esteem and subsequent career performance. For the traditional scholarly pursuit of knowledge, students have substituted, usually unknowingly, an attempt to measure up to these unacknowledged standards. Inevitably, though, this adaptation must result in major problems: because the hidden curriculum does not apply well to real-world problems and subsequent career work and interactions, success as a student may be merely the prelude to a crashing failure by an executive ill-prepared to meet his job's challenges.

### Faculty responsibility

With the faculty must rest the responsibility for tackling the problems posed by the gap between the hidden curriculum and more rationally established

criteria for academic study. While absolving the faculty from premeditated evil intent — "the faculty is not playing a duplicitous game . . ." — Snyder's book can only convince the careful reader that an aware faculty does have the capability to resolve many of the conflicts. After all, they establish the reward structure, they determine (to a large extent) the academic environment, and they are presumably competent enough teachers to recognize that their school's educational process is not producing the desired product.

Hopefully, though, students could also play an instrumental reform role. Undergraduates here bear the brunt of the dissonance between the two curricula: they must often sacrifice their intellectual interests by submitting to a rewards system that at best ignores their creative intelligence. The perceptive and sensitive student will find Snyder's book a salvation, an assurance that blame for the clash between his thirst for knowledge and an impersonal educational system may well rest squarely with the university. Perhaps he will be motivated to join similarly perceptive students and faculty in attempts to improve.

### Source of discontent

This hidden curriculum concept, then, captures the essence of the discontent prevalent on many college campuses. The few students at school for a genuine scholarly pursuit of knowledge chafe under a petty and meaningless set of standards that distracts their attention and stifles their creativity, while the more sizable number of students reluctantly on campus because a college degree is *de rigueur* soon tire of school and turn their interests elsewhere. Faculty may attribute slumping attendance and growing restlessness to the wrong causes, unwilling or unable to recognize the role their hidden curriculum plays.

There are other, more subtle or particular, aspects to the second standards. Does the university, for example, encourage an instrumental or expressive approach to learning? "The instrumental student has a pragmatic approach to education . . . such students ask themselves how (or whether) the study of a text or the writing of a paper can help them achieve a higher grade and thus further their specific career of life plans." In contrast, "the expressive student has a more idealistic approach to education . . . studying a text, the expressive student first considers how the text may contribute to his understanding, and only sec-

ondarily how knowledge of the text may contribute to his grade." Charlie Mann '72 highlighted the distinction in his appendix to the Commission report — "It seems as if many students find it difficult to distinguish between grades and learning."

### Implications

The implications are clear. Away from the somewhat artificial university reward structure, the professional skilled in the instrumental approach to learning may lack the ability to grasp the problems his job presents. The undergraduate accustomed to studying his discipline by concentrating on passing tests and problem sets could flounder when told to be creative in graduate work. But the university, by its own reward structure and faculty emphasis, can encourage the individual development of the expressive approach.

Another crucial facet is the growing demand on the individual faculty members' time. Increasingly, professors must squeeze more and more tasks into an already-overcrowded schedule. Research and class time must compete with the new demands for more contact with students, service on faculty committees, and the like. This time factor could spell the difference between success and defeat for many an educational experiment; faculty/student committees, for example, that increase the pressure on a professor's schedule (and nerves) may only exacerbate relations.

### Experiment

In fact, Snyder takes pains to emphasize the hidden curriculum's foreboding presence in the background of any attempts to experiment with the formal curriculum. Failure to anticipate the hidden curriculum's effect could be grievous. A professor, say, who tries to liberalize his class by foregoing compulsory problem sets may be punished with a drop in student interest. Why? The demands of other courses encourage students to neglect the looser subject to concentrate on the heavy work load for other courses.

### Elitist schools

A fourth aspect pertains directly to such elitist institutions as MIT. Although professors may reward mere competence with good quiz grades, their special praise is for the creativity most students lack and their courses seldom succeed in developing. "Elitist educational systems are very hard on their students; they sponsor them, they surround them with the best of facilities, they give them close personal attention and nur-

ture their gifts, but finally they make severe judgements on the majority of them." Or, a bit more eloquently, "this faculty attitude cannot but be a source of strain for the ordinary student who is not a Rutherford or an Einstein, or a T.S. Eliot, and who knows it." There are alternatives for the school able to recognize its punishing effect.

And there is one important effect that Snyder mentions almost in passing, but which deserves more emphasis. Often the hidden curriculum may have the effect of shielding the formal curriculum, the subject matter, from a searching, intellectual study. Harried by the constant pressure to meet the second standards, students may neglect to pause and examine whether

the material they are offered is truly relevant or useful: the school's education could stagnate.

### Effect

What effect might Snyder's book have? Much depends on its circulation. The more that faculty members read the book, the more that students press their professors for justifications of course content or the evaluation process, the more likely it is that useful reform will take place. For the essence of tackling the hidden curriculum is bringing it out into the open. Using Snyder's book as a guide, the MIT community might eliminate much of the malcontent on campus by stripping away superfluous trappings that only hinder true educational progress.

Movie:

## Love Story

By Dea Kleiman

What do you say about a movie that should have been a book? That its Ali MacGraw was not the Jenny that you'd hoped she'd be. That the "love" you once cried for shamed you in its Paramount perfection.

As a book, *Love Story* was readable, believable, and sometimes even beautiful when things were left unsaid. Enough was left to the reader so that gaps could be filled in by fantasized personalized substitutions. When *Love Story* opens on the screen, however, Jenny becomes ready made. The "love" that on paper was believable, now depends on the 1940-type sentimental slobbery of Francis Lai's score. Arthur Hiller has filled in all those necessary gaps . . . or maybe this "love story" is just a continuous one. Scenes progress awkwardly and possibly reality redemptions

such as Ollie IV—Oliver III relations completely miss the point. The book concludes with a sensitively-conveyed reuniting of a father and son. The movie, however, by tear-probing time tactics and unbroken pride barriers, ends on a note of stagnation. "Love is never having to say you're sorry." Arthur Hiller should be.

Ryan O'Neal is a convincing Ollie, as he skillfully conveys sensitivity masked in pride. One of the few other redeeming factors is John Marley who, although he doesn't say much, doesn't have to. He is a perfect Mr. Cavilleri. Besides a few familiar shots of Cambridge, and an exciting scenario of a hockey game, there is not too much else that is worthwhile in this film. What do you say about a movie that failed? That the two-hour wait in the cold just wasn't worth it.

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