

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Essay/Assignment Cover Sheet

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Essay/Assignment title *Revealing the Hidden Curriculum in Art Education:
The Role of Assessment Practices.*

Criteria	Ex	VG	Good	Fair	Poor	Comment
Introduction (statement of problem, response to task)						
Range and use of appropriate sources						
Development of argument (analysis, interpretation)						
Conclusions (application, findings, outcomes)						
Presentation, language, academic conventions						

Formative Feedback:

Indicative grade:

Tutor: _____

Date: _____

Revealing the Hidden Curriculum in Art Education: The Role of Assessment Practices.



Figure: My Creative exploration of shapes. Photograph taken by Jennifer in Phoebe Hearst Preschool Learning Center 2005.

Introduction

In this essay, I will be focusing on Revealing The Hidden Curriculum in Art Education: The Role of Assessment Practices. This research will be centered around the context of the Irish Secondary School system. The reason I selected this topic is because I believe it sheds light on the hidden curriculum that is shaping how education, especially in art, is structured. The photograph above represents my personal experience as a student, I attended many different traditional and nontraditional school settings. This photograph was taken by my preschool teacher in Phoebe Hearst Learning Center, San Francisco, California. This preschool uses Montessori's methods and celebrates creativity, play and problem solving through all subjects. I believe this environment gave me an early sense of identity and confidence as an artist. This essay will explore how assessment practices, both overt and hidden, play a significant role in this. Specifically, I will discuss how assessment in the Leaving Certificate (LC) prioritises technique and final outcomes, which often limits creativity and personal expression. I will also contrast this with how art is assessed at the National College of Art and Design (NCAD), which places more value on portfolios that

reflect a student's creative process, rather than just final results. By exploring the literature around the New Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle, I aim to reveal how these assessment systems influence art education and whether they support or hinder student creativity. Exploring the hidden curriculum in art education is essential not only for fostering creativity but also for challenging the broader educational expectations that shape student's views of their potential as artists.

The hidden curriculum refers to the lessons, values, and attitudes students absorb outside of the formal curriculum. (Giroux & Penna, 1979). This concept is particularly relevant in art education, where assessment practices often send subtle messages about what is considered valuable in learning. In secondary school, art assessments for the Leaving Certificate focus largely on measurable skills, like technique and the final piece or product. This differs from more creative, process-led approaches, like those at NCAD, where assessment centers on portfolios with a brief that allows for personal expression. In the context of my own experience, during my time in secondary school, I struggled to express my individuality within a system that favoured conformity, which ultimately discouraged me from experimenting with different artistic styles. I was not challenged artistically during these six years because of this schooling and knew I had to 'wait till college' to pursue my own practice in an educational setting. I believe this highlights the hidden curriculum in action, where the emphasis on technical skill over creative exploration often stifles students' ability to express themselves freely.

I have experienced how the hidden curriculum influences assessment in art education. During my time in secondary school, I noticed that the Leaving Certificate art exam placed far more importance on technical skills and finished pieces rather than on creativity, exploration, or development of ideas. Instead of encouraging students to make something interesting or unique, the assessment focused on demonstrating skills on a blank, often intimidating A3 page. The rigid nature of this system seemed to limit creativity, as it emphasised technique over personal expression. This approach felt more like a test of how well I could execute specific skills. I believe that the rigid assessment system in secondary school fails to capture the true creative potential of students, as it focuses too much on the final product instead of the creative process. This is a clear example of the hidden curriculum, as it reinforces the idea that art is only valuable if it meets specific criteria.

In contrast, the assessment practices at NCAD, particularly the emphasis on portfolios, are far more aligned with the true nature of artistic learning. At NCAD, the portfolio is a tool that showcases a student's creative process, personal expression, and individual development over time, rather than just the final outcome. The method allows students to feel free to experiment and make mistakes which is a necessity to creating successful art in my opinion. This process aids true creativity and individuality in art students.

The Hidden Curriculum in Context: An Overview of Assessment in Art Education

According to Schellekens et al. (2021) assessment practices shape the educational process, influencing student's understanding of their learning experiences. Assessment practices in art and design education are central in shaping student's experiences and understanding of art. Traditionally assessment methods, such as grading based on technical skill, commitment to guidelines, and aesthetic quality, are the most important thing to educational settings. These methods offer a clear structure for grading and that is why they are in place and difficult to change, but these methods often reflect a formulaic and narrow approach that prioritises in measurable outcomes, over creatively, reflection and critical thinking and problem solving. Schellekens et al. (2021) discusses three types of assessment practices in their scoping review on Assessment as Learning (AaL), Assessment for Learning (AfL), and Assessment of Learning (AoL). These assessment practices fundamentally shape the educational process, influencing not only what is taught but also how students interpret the value of their learning experiences. In the context of art and design education, implicitly teach students what is considered valuable in art, creating a hidden curriculum that shapes their perceptions of creativity and artistic worth.

Likewise, Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences challenges educational systems that prioritise technical proficiency, suggesting that this approach promotes a limited understanding of intelligence. In traditional art assessments, students are often graded based on their technical ability to replicate specific techniques or adhere to guidelines. For instance, a student's ability to create a precise, realistic drawing may be heavily valued, while experimental approaches or abstract expression might be undervalued (Efland, 2002). This focus on technique over creativity may implicitly teach students that perfectionism and conformity are more important than innovation, which contrasts with the broader goals of

fostering individual expression and critical thinking in art education. In the context of art education, this perspective often results in an emphasis on perfecting techniques at the expense of encouraging creativity and innovation, potentially discouraging students from exploring unconventional approaches. Harlen (2007) similarly notes that this traditional emphasis conflicts with the principles of nurturing lifelong learning and fostering creativity.

In contrast to this, alternative assessment methods such as process based grading and self-assessment, offer a more holistic view of student learning. Process based assessment evaluated the creative journey rather than just the final product. The new Junior and Senior cycle have tried to implement this into their new exams and marking schemes but it is not implemented enough. The junior cycle and leaving cycle should emphasise experimentation, risk taking and reflection similar to the university standard portfolio (Department of Education, 2024).

Furthermore, this hidden curriculum significantly influences how students perceive art through assessment practices. The hidden curriculum contains values and beliefs through educational activities, often without being explicitly acknowledged. In art education, traditional assessment methods prioritise technical skills and adherence to predetermined standards, sending a subtle message that these are more important than creativity or originality. Since expressing yourself through the arts can be a beautiful part of life this disruption in creativity can be harmful to a student's self-esteem. This hidden curriculum is apparent and more harmful than what meets the eye (Giroux & Penna, 1979).

To summarise, assessment methods in art education are closely linked to the hidden curriculum, shaping how students understand what is valued in art. Traditional Approaches provide structure and accountability but often focus too much on technical skills, limiting the definition of success. On the other hand, alternative methods like process based learning grading and self assessment encourage a broader and more inclusive view of art education, there just has to be time and resources put into it. By rethinking and improving how assessments are done, teachers can create environments that not only help students grow artistically but also prepare them for careers and university in the art world (Parsons, M., 2005).

The Hidden Curriculum and Traditional Assessment

'Schools are laboratories of experimentation on young minds, drill centres for the habits and attitudes that corporate society demands. Mandatory education serves children only incidentally; its real purpose is to turn them into servants.' (Gatto, 2002).

Assessment of Learning (AoL) is the summative assessment Schellekens et al. (2021). Traditional assessments have their advantages, as they have endured over time for a reason. However, the aim of this essay is to critically examine these established methods alongside alternative approaches, specifically within the context of art and design education, to identify which strategies are most effective in fostering creativity and aligning with the unique objectives of the discipline. This traditional structure we still hold today does not suit the way in which students can succeed as artists. Evaluating what students have learned at the end of the unit of learning. It is a marking scheme that records achievement, often for accountability purposes or to compare against established standards. With this method, students are learning that the process in this discipline is not as important as the finished product or exam (Harlen, 2007).

Jackson (1968) highlights the psychological dynamics of schooling, noting that students are socialised through peer interactions in often competitive and unwelcoming classroom environments. He argues that schools promote conformity to help students navigate these conditions. Additionally, schools contribute to shaping a disciplined, obedient workforce, equipped with the necessary skills and attitudes to meet societal labour demands. This process forms part of the hidden curriculum, as it is rarely explicitly acknowledged by teachers, who may be unaware of its role. This system could potentially impact student creativity, leading to a risk-averse attitude, particularly when certain styles or techniques are graded more favourably. Additionally, traditional assessments may favour students with prior exposure to conventional art techniques, reinforcing existing inequities in the classroom. Jackson also states that this role the teacher may not be aware of can have an effect positively or negatively towards behaviour in the classroom.

Traditional approaches to assessment in art, such as summative evaluation focusing on finished products or artefacts, send clear messages about the importance of technique, conformity and meeting prescribed standards. While these criteria are effective in evaluating specific skills they often fail to recognise the subjective and multifaceted nature of artistic expression. Even though it is useful for accountability, the summative assessment often

overlooks the deeper learning processes involved in creative work. these methods subtly convey a narrow view of what is valued in art, such as technical skill and adherence to guidelines (Harlen & James, 1997).

The Hidden Curriculum and Non-Traditional Assessment

Assessment for Learning (Afl) is the formative approach to assessment Schellekens et al. (2021). This untraditional structure. The goal is to support and enhance student learning. It involves ongoing feedback that helps students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and where to go from there. Teachers that use this AfL approach have different strategies in mind on a day to day basis. Their students are usually more engaged active learners generating ideas quickly out of experimentation. A lesson plan for a class using AfL might use peer feedback, self-assessment, and formative quizzes(Black & William, 1998).

The hidden curriculum is reflected in the social dynamics of the classroom, where the teacher exercises authority and regulations shape the student-teacher relationship. Various learning activities, along with the teacher's language, textbooks, tracking systems, all play a role in reinforcing this hidden curriculum (Martin, 1976). As a result, the hidden curriculum is not immediately apparent and requires careful examination to uncover the underlying principles.

Gatto explains in his book that the most fulfilling teaching experience he ever had occurred in a classroom with thick carpeting but no chairs. He states that he had thirty students, no textbooks, syllabus, or any clear objective. He focused on whatever emerged in the room each day and explored it further. In that environment, he believes he witnessed more learning, both for himself and his students, than in any other setting (Gatto, 2002).

An argument made by Anderson and Milbrant (2005), is that approaches such as these align with the goal of 'authentic instruction' in art, which values the development of personal expression and critical engagement over technical proficiency. When we look at art we no longer even look for photographic realism or perfection so why would we expect this from our students? Self assessment enables students to take ownership of their own unique expression and learning. This will encourage them to set personalised goals and critically evaluate their progress. These methods not only recognise the different ways in which

students learn but also challenges the traditional hidden curriculum by valuing exploitation, and individuality (Anderson & Milbrant, 2005).

Skelton (1997) does not explicitly argue that traditional methods of assessment are without merit, but rather that they are limited in their ability to capture the full range of learning experiences. He emphasizes the need for more comprehensive approaches that recognise informal, hidden aspects of schooling. However, his work does not dismiss traditional assessment entirely but calls for a broader perspective that incorporates these hidden elements. While acknowledging their shortcomings, he does not completely negate the value of traditional assessment systems.

Conclusion

As an aspiring educator, I would like to be a part of the change in addressing this issue through my own actions and words in the classroom by informing young people about this problem and taking conscious efforts to challenge it in my own practice. Assessment practices in art shape the hidden curriculum and influence students' understanding of what is valued in art. I will vary my pedagogy to suit students' individual needs, making the learning fun for students and myself. This essay conveys that having a holistic, formative approach to teaching makes students more creative, equal, and active parts of society, not just employees (Gatto, 2002).

Further research into the hidden curriculum and assessment practices in art education could explore how the overall school environment influences student creativity and therefore mental health. Especially the constraints on self-expression and individuality. It would be valuable to investigate how the structure of schools, including classroom settings, uniforms and institutional norms, limits student's ability to express their unique artistic voices. This research could examine the tension between standardised assessments and the fostering of individuality, and how this tension impacts students' artistic development and sense of self within the classroom (Jackson, PW 1968).

One potential solution explored in this essay, supported by various research findings, is the integration of Leaving Cert art assessments with university portfolio guidelines. By aligning these two frameworks, students would be encouraged to become 'process-led reflective practitioner's', fostering creativity and critical thinking. This shift could create a

more cohesive and relevant assessment system that better reflects the aims of art education as a whole. Further research into this area could examine how such an integration could improve the well-being of Leaving Cert students, alleviating the pressures associated with time constraints and mental health challenges. Emphasising the value of artistic exploration over rigid planning and conformity would allow students to focus on their learning, creativity, and self-expression, ultimately making their educational journey more meaningful and holistic. This approach would not only enhance student outcomes but also help in dismantling the hidden curriculum that often prioritises compliance over creativity (Zimmerman, E. 2009).

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