



Mountain Sun Community School

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The Hidden Curriculum

The “hidden curriculum” of schools is the aspects of schooling that are implicit, usually unintentional that play a role in constructing a student’s image of self, others, and the world. These hidden aspects of learning are generally value-based ideas communicated indirectly, through actions and words that are part of the everyday life for children in their school community. The messages imparted through the hidden curriculum usually deal with attitudes, values, beliefs, and behavior. This is why we believe in addition to the cognitive development, a school has the responsibility to be aware of what messages we impart to children about learning, life, relationships, and connection to the world around them. The school framework and institutional design, how children are learning, and how they are assessed are all key functions of what children learn in the hidden curriculum.

While attending to the hidden curriculum can not be an exact science, at Mountain Sun Community School we are making it a priority to identify and be intentional about the powerful influence the culture and climate of a school can have on a child’s whole development. Core to our values and our ‘meta-messages’ in this school environment is practicing respect for self, for others, and for the environment. These things are foundational to all human development.

What is the hidden curriculum/values children are learning in schools and what will the priorities be at Mountain Sun Community School?

~ They are **learning what knowledge is** – is knowledge a commodity? Children see it that way when the motivation for learning is to advance oneself by doing well on high-stakes tests. What does a school look like whose meta-message to students is the following: The pursuit of knowledge is its own reward. It’s human nature to find learning and the application of what is being learned deeply satisfying. The pursuit of knowledge can be self-revealing. Knowledge should convey a sense of interdependency.

~ **Where does self-worth/value come from?** When knowledge becomes a measurement of the individual, we end up getting value from test scores, grades, etc.(it’s external) instead of an internal perception of self-worth. The natural discovery of what you know leads you down a path for further knowledge and discovery and hence self-worth and value becomes more internalized. What can be done in school to send this meta-message?

~ **Is the basis of life competitive or cooperative?** The same processes that teach children their worth can be measured by test scores also teaches them life is and must be competitive, that they gain at someone else’s expense. We think our culture is moving more strongly towards a need for cooperative solutions and collaborative work environments—that we gain together. Developing the skills, tools, and values to participate in ventures cooperatively is another aspect of the hidden curriculum we will make a priority.

~ **What is community and how do we participate in it?** How we interact in community – how we contribute and give of ourselves to others also becomes part of our self-worth/value and personal satisfaction. (When the classroom is open, collaborative learning is incorporated, when “respect for others” becomes a core part of the curriculum – opportunities to have valuable interactions with others are boundless). The development of morals is rooted in relationship to other people, animals, and the natural world. This is related to the insight that we all gain together.

~ **What does it mean to express individuality?** Typically, understanding about this emerges in institutional school contexts of competition and the use of knowledge as a commodity for personal gain. However, consistent with our other hidden-curriculum goals, we believe individuality can be redefined as “what is my UNIQUE kinship to the world around me (the natural world, including all living things – people, animals, plants, earth as a whole). Kinship implies cooperative relationship and mutual gain/blessing and that self worth derives partly from one’s unique participation in that kinship. The most significant knowledge is the knowledge that helps people experience and express this kinship to their surroundings. *Thematic units contribute to that sense of kinship and interconnectedness, as well as learning about oneself. Creating an intentional learning environment that creates space for that is central to our “hidden curriculum.”*

~ **How do students exercise their imaginations in school settings?** Presently, imagination is valued most for creating technical solutions to certain kinds of problems, but in the above context of our elaborated “hidden curriculum,” imagination could become a fountain of solutions for the deeper and as-yet-unsolved human problems that so desperately require solutions, addressing the forces that pull our world apart instead of bringing it together. To live in today’s changing world, the imagination like any other “muscle” must be exercised and empowered within the kind of environment we speak of here if the changes are to be more profound than mere technological advancements. This too is central to the hidden curriculum at Mountain Sun Community School.