

On **S**tereotyping and the **H**idden **C**urriculum:

A Minicourse

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What is the relationship of curriculum and pedagogy to stereotypes? What is the relationship of research to stereotypes? What type of knowledge is a stereotype? What type of theory is a stereotype?

The concept of the “hidden curriculum” was coined and defined in the early 1950s. In a critique of the secondary school, Wattenberg (1951) observed that

Whenever the formal curriculum gives precedence to other people’s needs, then students will create from it hidden curriculum. What goes on in their minds is not what we dictate but what their own strivings make necessary. The curriculum which ignores the goals of youth is always a fraud. It is a deceptive surface. Whether we will it or not, youth’s needs do decide what they learn. The true question is how we are to face that fact. (p. 12)

Through the 1960s and early 1970s, especially given collective youth activism, the hidden curriculum became a concern and challenge for educators and researchers. For instance in 1973, Vallance (1973) observed,

we have witnessed the discovery—or, rather, we have heard the allegation, for the issue is cast most often as criticism—that schools are teaching more than they claim to teach, that they are doing it systematically, and doing it well. A pervasive hidden curriculum has been discovered in operation. The functions of this hidden curriculum have been variously identified as the inculcation of values, political socialization, training in obedience and docility, the perpetuation of traditional class structure functions that may be characterized generally as social control. (p. 5)

Subsequently a few years later Martin (1976) asked, “What Should We Do with a Hidden Curriculum When We Find One?” We can ask the same of stereotypes: What can or ought we do with a stereotype once we identify it?

Stereotypes and the hidden curriculum are intricately linked and interdependent. In many ways, they share the same histories. Most recently, stereotypes and the hidden curriculum share histories of what was in the nineteenth century called “implicit knowledge” and early twentieth century “implicit cognition.” The philosophical or psychological problems at that time were the sources of implicit knowledge and how this becomes explicit, or how what we become aware of what we were previously unaware of in our cognition or thinking. This was reconceived by Freud and psychoanalysis as a problem of how the unconscious generates or guides the unconscious. In behaviorism in the 1930s, implicit cognition was defined as knowledge or a “form of behavior reactions, reflexes, instincts, and all kinds of selective responses where there is no definite conscious correlate” (Benjamin, 1930, p. 384).

Although used metaphorically in the nineteenth century, “stereotype” referred to a printing process developed in the eighteenth century. In the new process, stereotype plates were cast from a mold formed by setting the traditional moveable type forms. Stereotyping meant casting and fixing the type in an unchangeable or durable metal plate. Metaphorically, stereotyping knowledge meant, alternatively, stopping the process of inquiry or fixing knowledge as unchangeable or durable.

In 1922 in *Public Opinion*, Lippmann considerably expanded this meaning and theorized stereotype to refer to its common meaning. In exploring how public opinion and collective knowledge are shaped, Lippmann was concerned with “the stereotypes we carry about in our heads;” the “subtlest and most pervasive of all influences are those which create and maintain the repertory of stereotypes” (pp. 89-90). “What matters,” he says, “is the character of the stereotypes, and the gullibility with which we employ them” (p. 90). “A pattern of stereotypes is not neutral. . . . stereotypes are, therefore, highly charged with the feelings that are attached to them.” (p. 96). Lippmann continues, explaining the problems in reducing stereotypes to a phenomenon forming in absence of “facts,” research or a sense of adequate information:

There is nothing so obdurate to education or to criticism as the stereotype. It stamps itself upon the evidence in the very act of securing the evidence. . . . For when a system of stereotypes is well fixed, our attention is called to those facts which support it, and diverted from those which contradict. . . . access to information is obstructed and uncertain, and that our apprehension is

deeply controlled by our stereotypes; that the evidence available to our reason is subject to illusions of defense, prestige, morality, space, time, and sampling. (pp. 98-99, 119, 154).

Lippmann suggests that stereotypes, as generalizations, are somewhat necessary. From Lippmann's work, stereotype was defined as "a fixed mental pattern or image which may or may not be wholly in accord with the facts which it is supposed to represent" (Power, 1935, p. 388). Basically for Lippmann, stereotype refers to overt *and* hidden bias and inequity. A stereotype motivated by ableism, ageism, elitism, heterosexism, racism or sexism, commonly defined as a generalization made about a group, "concerning a trait attribution, which is considered to be unjustified by an observer" Brigham (1971, p. 31). Hence, stereotype refers to a "preexisting kernel," or "frozen, lexicalized figures borrowed from social" (Amossy, pp. 379, 380). How do stereotypes form and from where do they originate? What of the preexistence or borrowed nature of stereotypes?

Amossy (2002) extends the histories of stereotypes and the hidden curriculum back to ancient discourse:

Inherited from ancient Greece, the notion of *doxa* as common knowledge and shared opinions haunts all contemporary disciplines that put communication and social interaction at the center of their concerns. To be sure, the specific term is not always used: *doxa* appears under various guises, such as public opinion, verisimilitude, commonsense knowledge, commonplace, *idée reçue*, stereotype, cliché. Broadly speaking, however, all that is considered true, or at least probable, by a majority of people endowed with reason, or by a specific social group, can be called doxic. Whether the Greek term is explicitly mentioned or not, the functions of *doxa* in social life and in verbal exchanges have been the subject of continuous inquiries, if not of sharp polemics, for the two last centuries. (p. 369)

What can or ought we do with a stereotype once we identify it? If a purpose of education is unveiling "the values and beliefs insidiously hidden in innocent-seeming stories or pictures," then what ought students and teachers do with a stereotype once identified (Amossy, p. 376). If a purpose of curriculum and pedagogy is un hiding the hidden curriculum, then what do we do once it's in plain sight? If this type of doxic is toxic, then how do we detox?

References

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- Wattenberg, W. E. (1951). Real needs focus learning. *High School Journal*, 35(1), 11-16.

Minicourse Readings

1. Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape the intellectual identities and performance. *American Psychologist*, 52(6), 613-629.
2. Agha, A. (1998). Stereotypes and registers of honorific language. *Language in Society*, 27(2), 151-193.
3. Amossy, R. (2002). Introduction to the study of *doxa*. *Poetics Today*, 23(3), 369-394.
4. Rapport, N. (2010). Apprehending *Anyone*: The non-indexical, post-cultural, and cosmopolitan human actor. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 16, 84-101.
5. Sullivan-Catlin, H. (2002). Food, hunger, and poverty: A thematic approach to integrating service learning. *Teaching Sociology*, 30(1), 39-52.
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7. Campbell, M. C. & Mohr, G. S. (2011). Seeing is eating: How and when activation of a negative stereotype increases stereotype-conducive behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(3), 431-444.
8. Huebner, D. (1985). Religious metaphors in the language of education. *Religious Education*, 80(3), 460-472.

Resources

1. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Ottawa, CA: Author.
2. Lippmann, W. (1922/1929). Stereotypes. In *Public opinion* (pp. 79-158). New York, NY: MacMillan.

On Stereotyping Minicourse

1. **Part I. Lecture: On Stereotyping and the Hidden Curriculum (30 minutes)**
2. **Part II. Minipaper: Dimensioning *and* Theorizing (in class writing activity, 45 min)**
 - a. Identify and focus on a persistent or destructive stereotype or alternatively a constructive or generative stereotype.
 - b. Dimension (or map) *and* theorize this stereotype and stereotyping as a process.
 - c. The options are yours.
3. **Part III. Microvideo: In/On Camera Analysis (2-3 min)**
 - a. With a peer, record a summary of your theorizing for presentation to the class. The video will not be public outside of the class unless you and your peer choose to make it public.
4. **Part IV. Microanalysis: (in class, 4-5 minutes each student = 1 hour)**
 - a. Screen (project) the 2-3 minute video and address any feedback or comments (5 min total).
5. Notes on Dimensioning a Problem
 - a. Dimensioning a problem means accepting the givens of a problem but also being able to ask insightful questions about it— being not so imprisoned by its context or by our prior experiences.
 - b. A problem is a thing: “just as an object, spatially considered, may be regarded as a meeting place and special articulation of three dimensions so the object in its concrete fullness may be regarded as the meeting place of many more. It has its own position for example in a definitely graded universe of colour, of utility, of beauty and of truth. . . . It is characteristic of a dimension that no limit can be set to it either in the outward or the inward direction. It is thus in its nature absolutely continuous. At the same time if we arrest it in any particular of its infinite extension what we shall strike upon will be and must be something discrete and definite. There is doubtless something paradoxical in this.” (Bowman, 1910, 507)
 - c. Uni-dimensional v multi-dimensional v trans-dimensional problems
 - d. Most fundamentally, dimensioning involves rendering a problem as four- or three-dimensional by situating it in space (geography) and time (history), and giving it depth & breadth (disciplinarity). One gives “timeliness” to and “heightens” and “deepens” awareness of a problem.
 - e. One question is, how many dimensions shall one give a problem or does a problem have?
 - f. One can seemingly multiply dimensions through interdisciplinarity.
 - g. M-theory speculates ten dimensions and this is a good rule of thumb or goal for dimensioning phenomena, problems, and processes— 10 dimensions / phenomenon, problem, process.
 - h. Dimensioning invariably involves tracking, mapping, and framing