

**Revealing the Hidden Curriculum of the School
Playground: A Narrative Study**

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Revealing the Hidden Curriculum of the School Playground: A Narrative Study

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Abstract:

This paper provides a qualitative narrative methodology of the hidden curriculum of the school playground inside an elementary school. Researchers have concentrated on studying the effects of the hidden curriculum inside the classroom but rarely directed their studies towards the school playground, a place where the hidden curriculum is expected to reveal its face to students as interactions of all kinds take place during this busy time allocated for sports education. The three remedies proposed by Jerome Bruner, (namely contrast, confrontation, and metacognition), that counter the heavy pedagogical focus on the scientific method are integrated into an art-based narrative research where the researcher collects stories through interviewing and observation and then crafts these narratives into a new story, which becomes the final creative work of the research. Using first-person narration, four protagonists tell the same story from their perspectives, thus providing the reader with an awareness of the kinds of problems that exist in such a setting in the school and encouraging those concerned to discuss the best possible solutions to such problems students may encounter.

Keywords: hidden curriculum, school playground, narrative research, elementary school.

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الكشف عن المنهج الخفي في ملعب المدرسة: دراسة سردية

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المستخلص:

تقدم هذه الورقة دراسة نوعية سردية للمنهج الخفي في ملعب المدرسة لتكشف عن بعض جوانب هذا المنهج في المدرسة الابتدائية. يركّز الباحثون عادة على دراسة آثار المنهج الخفي داخل الصف الدراسي ويغفلون عن دراسة هذا المنهج في ملعب المدرسة التي قد يكشف فيه المنهج الخفي عن نفسه حيث التفاعلات الاجتماعية بمختلف أنواعها تحدث داخل الملعب بحكم طبيعة مادة التربية البدنية. استخدمت هذه الدراسة ثلاثة مبادئ رئيسة عند جيروم برونر لمواجهة هذا الاتجاه المحموم في استخدام الطريقة العلمية في البحث التربوي (وهي التباين، المواجهة، وما وراء المعرفة) وتمت ترجمتها إلى بحث سردي أدبي arts based research يجمع الباحث بياناته من خلال المقابلة والملاحظة ثم يعيد كتابتها من جديد على هيئة قصة تكون هي الناتج النهائي لهذه الدراسة. استخدم الباحث ضمير المتكلم في سرد القصص التي رواها على لسان الشخصيات الأربع الرئيسية بحيث يسرد كل واحد منهم وجهة نظره إزاء نفس الأزمة التي حدثت في القصة. هذا النوع من المنهج لا يوفّر حلاً وعظية في نهاية البحث وإنما يستهدف وعي القارئ بنوع المشكلات التي تظهر في مثل هذا المكان من المدرسة ويشجّع أولئك المهتمين على مناقشة أفضل الحلول الممكنة لمثل هذا النوع من المشكلات التي يواجهها الطلاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المنهج الخفي، ملعب المدرسة، المنهج السردية، المرحلة الابتدائية.

Introduction

Students learn more in their schools than through the formal courses written by concerned educational authorities. Curriculum theorists have differentiated between two types of curricula offered to students in their schools: The first one is formal, clearly defined, and written, such as textbooks, guides, and educational policy; and the second one is hidden or informal, which students acquire through social interaction at school.

Philip Jackson was the first to use the term “hidden curriculum” to indicate that students learn specific skills through this curriculum: learn to wait quietly and adhere to instructions, learn to do homework, learn to live in crowds, learn to postpone or give up desires, learn how to be isolated in crowds, and learn to suffer in silence (Jackson, 1968). In the same year, Dreeben and Wesley (1968) saw that the hidden curriculum contributes to preparing students to become members of their community by teaching them a common culture, a system of norms that prepare all students for participation in public occupational and sociopolitical life.

Vallance (1980) believes that the hidden curriculum refers to the context of the school that can include the interactive relationship between the student and teacher, the structure of the classroom, and the organizational pattern of the educational institution as a social value system. In other words, the hidden curriculum is an aspect of the culture prevailing in school. This means that the study of the hidden curriculum needs to be ethnographic, as this type of qualitative research approach is concerned with the study of culture (Eisner, 2002).

This narrative qualitative research is conducted at Omar bin Al-Khattab Primary School (pseudonym) in Saudi Arabia, a government school with 163 students. We will hear from four participants from this school: the student, the physical education teacher, the school headmaster, and the student’s father. This is a study that uses a narrative method. The story, Jerome Bruner says, is a way to find the problem, not solve it. “We more often tell stories to forewarn than to instruct. And because of this, stories are a culture’s coin and currency” (Bruner, p. 15, 2003).

In keeping with Bruner, this study does not provide final solutions to the problems and issues revealed by the stories told by these four protagonists. However, this study will reveal, via narration, a hidden curriculum that may take place in the school playground and negatively affect the student. This creates awareness among teachers of how best to work with their students in school.

These four stories present contrasting views on the same issue. These stories represent not only the people in this particular school but also the situations that occur in other schools, with a difference that is appropriate to each school's context. Everyone in these stories has their own reasons for dealing with the problem from the point of view of what they believe in, as it is easy to blame the other when it comes to the responsibility that each of them bears. As stories usually are, readers will play a role in their interpretation and the discovery of the many facts that abound in these four narrations. The study begins with a literature review on the hidden curriculum since its inception and the foundational theoretical studies on the hidden curriculum in curriculum theory. Then, the researcher discusses the qualitative approach taken, the narrative method, and its theoretical framework. Next, the narrations of the four main characters are presented. At the end, the researcher writes his epilogue that place these four stories in their context.

Review of the Literature on the Hidden Curriculum

Early Educational research suggests that social interactions taking place within the school bring out a hidden curriculum through which the knowledge and skill needed for social and economic hegemony are transmitted to students who belong to the dominant rich class of society, while a practical curriculum is offered to suit the rest of the students (Apple, 1979; Bernstein, 1990; Bourdieu, 1977; Eggleston & Bernstein, 1977).

The hidden curriculum is also a tool for “producing” what society needs from the “obedient” workers who accept the political and economic conditions without any objections (Illich, 2002). It also reproduces social segregation or stratification, which means that the curriculum itself varies in content or teaching in accordance with the

social class the students represent(Anyon, 1980, 1981). This curriculum is also seen as a tool in socialization, in which social discrimination is practiced by some members of society at the expense of the weaker classes(Margolis & Romero, 1998). This curriculum preserves the social relationships that exist in a capitalist society, which are represented by the hierarchical division between teachers and students and the intense competition among students resulting from evaluation and tests that sort them into varying grades and levels (Bowles, 1976).

Conversely, the hidden curriculum is not limited to the theory of Bowles and Gintis (Bowels, 1967), known as the theory of correspondence or reproduction, which believes that the values and standards offered by the school reflect what the economic system in society demands. It even goes beyond that into resistance where many students reject this hidden curriculum. The students experience contradictions that lead to their rejection of both the official and hidden curriculum that reproduces class in society (Apple, 1980).

In addition, the hidden curriculum affects students' moral character, forcing them to live with two kinds of values, one is ideal and the other is realistic practiced in their lives, leading them to lose social responsibility (Power & Kohlberg, 1986). The hidden curriculum forces students to adopt strategies that help them live in school: compliance, pragmatism, or resistance, wherein the school becomes a battleground for the power struggle between teachers and students (Marsh, 1997).

Many of the educational outcomes are not the result of the official curriculum that educational institutions set and for which they exert continuous and painstaking efforts, but rather the result of casual learning of behaviors that accompany the processes of formal education. Despite a few exceptional cases, hidden curricula are seen as an effective force that weakens the official curricula objectives, especially those concerning teaching democracy and developing the methods of scientific thinking (Obaid & Ibrahim, 1994).

Some educators use the term “hidden curriculum” to criticize the school and its official system. One of them describes the contradictory role of the school as follows: “No one believes anymore that scientists

are trained in science classes or politicians in civic classes, or poets in English classes. The truth is that schools do not really teach anything except how to obey orders” (Gatto, 1992, p.21).

The formal written curriculum has always drawn the attention of curricularists; the second type, the hidden curriculum, is far from their interest, despite its great importance to students and their values, attitudes, and principles which may run counter to the contents of the formal written curriculum (Wren, 1999).

The school may provide contradictory messages and have multiple explanations such as the contrast between the curriculum and the context in which instruction is conducted, or the school may adopt a contradictory role of providing opportunities that promote freedom as well as imposing restrictions on student independence. Therefore, in the event of such a negative influence and the contrast between the written and the hidden curriculum, there is an urgent need to study the processes of this hidden curriculum and its effects on students (Cornbleth, 1990).

The above, especially in view of the scarcity of Arab studies on this subject, clearly shows the importance of studying the hidden curriculum in the educational process and revealing its hidden aspects that help in understanding the problems faced by students. Since the hidden curriculum has adverse and beneficial positive effects, this research will attempt to bring out the negative aspect of the hidden curriculum that students learn in the primary school playground.

Research Problem

Educationists are often surprised by the emergence of educational outcomes that were not pre-defined in goals and not completely clear in content. However, these outcomes were in total contradiction with the goals that everyone sought to achieve. These educational outcomes, which can be negative and harmful (Hlebowitsh, 1994), have been out of control of the formal written curriculum and are rejected by the formal educational system. Examples of this include the drug problem among students (Saudi Press Agency, 2005) and the prevalence of smoking among students at 30%, with female students at 35% (Al-Hatim, 2004). These goals contradict with the first

objective documented in the education policy (Ministry of Education, 1995).

The students themselves, as one study shows on the hidden curriculum of the school corridors explicitly expressed the need to uncover the hidden curriculum for the educators, politicians, and interested parties to develop appropriate educational programs and policies that improve their lives and develop their communities (Hemmings, 1999).

The research problem forced itself upon the attention of the researcher when he was touring the building of the school with student teachers and noticed a student, Ahmad, sitting in a chair watching his peers playing football in the school playground during the physical education class. He was outside the playground watching with observable anxiety. The following exchange took place between the researcher and the student:

- Good morning.
- Good morning.
- How are you?
- Fine, thank you.
- The weather is nice today. Why are you not playing with your peers?
- I have an ankle injury. Look at them; how they play. It is a mess.
- Where is the teacher?
- He was here a while ago.

The researcher left the playground and continued his tour with his students. Ahmed's emotional reaction during this brief encounter was the subject of one of the researcher's discussion sessions with his students who are training at the school. The researcher decided to follow Ahmed in the school playground and during the physical education classes. It became clear to him that there was an urgent need to reveal the reasons behind the anxiety and resentment that took possession of Ahmed. Thus, the problem of the research is summarized in this main question: **what is the negative hidden curriculum in the school playground that a student may encounter at the primary school level?**

The Concept of the Hidden Curriculum

The term “hidden”, or “unstudied” curriculum was coined by Philip Jackson (1968) to refer to 90% of what mostly goes on in the classroom, the three Rs -Rules, Routines, and Regulations. According to Portelli (1993), there are several words that can be used to describe the concept of the hidden curriculum such as the implicit, unstudied, covert, unwritten, invisible, latent, informal, or silent curriculum. Some call the hidden curriculum “what schooling does to people,” “by-products of schooling,” or “nonacademic outcome of schooling,” (Martin, 1976). Dewey used the word collateral to describe accidental learning that may take place inside or outside the classroom(Dewey, 1938).

Mariani (1999) borrows the metaphor of the iceberg to explain the concept of the hidden curriculum. The portion visible above the water surface is only a small part of a much larger whole invisible deep under the surface of water. There are some aspects in the curriculum that are visible like textbooks, objectives, standards, teaching techniques, methods, strategies, content, and methods of evaluations. This is called the official curriculum. By contrast, much is unknown about what is actually learned in class and school corridors – a hidden curriculum that may include values, attitudes, and ingrained cultural assumptions.

According to Vallance (1980), the term is used to refer to those nonacademic but educationally significant consequences of schooling that occur systematically but are not made explicit at any level of the public rationales of education.

The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology defines this curriculum as “the way in which cultural values and attitudes (such as obedience to authority, punctuality, and delayed gratifications) are transmitted through the structure of teaching and the organization of schools,” (Marshall, 1998).

A hidden curriculum is the values that are transmitted during the educational process and lies in the lapses of speech, actions, gestures, statements, and comments that address a specific subject of

experience, scientific content, event, or behavior that occur during instruction (Al-Othman, 2004).

The hidden curriculum can be defined as the one that encompasses all that can be learned in school but unintentional and not specified in the official curriculum (Al-Musallam, 1996); or the knowledge, values, ideas, and systems that students learn in school without planning but as a result of peer contact, the school system, the teaching methods used, or the self-understanding of knowledge (Al-Mosa, 2000); or the product of unplanned learning (Snyder, 1970); or the undeclared aspects of school culture (Eisner, 1994); or the learning of attitudes, principles, beliefs, values, and assumptions expressed by the unwritten rules and regulations intuited from the environment rather than being directly taught about them (Seddon, 1983).

This curriculum refers also to the learning that occurs outside the formal curriculum in the classroom and teaching is implicit through role models, institutional leadership, and peers (Edwards, 2002).

The hidden curriculum describes the mysterious and anamorphous nature of that hidden part of the curriculum which contrasts with the formal curriculum and with direct educational interactions (Sambell & McDowell, 1998).

In this study, the hidden curriculum is the harmful learning states that take place outside the unplanned formal curriculum and through the practices, laws and social interactions that occur within one of the school's premises, which is specifically here the school playground.

Research Methodology

The researcher's job as a supervisor mentoring student teachers (pre-service teachers) provided a unique opportunity for the researcher to visit the school regularly and see for himself the interactions taking place. A qualitative methodology was used to examine the school culture (Janesick, 1991). The type of research involves collecting data on the hidden curriculum through semi-structured interviews with the school principal, teachers, and parents in the form of open-ended conversations. The protagonists of these stories, namely the school principal, Sulaiman (pseudonym); and the physical education teacher, Mr. Saleh (pseudonym), were interviewed separately during the school day. As for Ahmed (pseudonym) and his father, Abd Al-

Rahman (pseudonym), they were interviewed in their house after the researcher received an invitation from Ahmed's father when he called him and expressed willingness and enthusiasm to talk about his son.

The researcher in this study uses narrative research as one of the types of qualitative research, which has recently become influential in education (Goodson, 2002). The educational researcher studies nature of stories through which our understanding of education is formed, away from the trend that sees education as separate and predictable events.

The narrative methodology helps researchers understand how people live their lives in the world around them. This approach allows people to tell their life stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). A narrative researcher collects data about people's lives and develops written narrative stories about their experiences and meanings.

Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2012) have distinguished between narrative analysis and analysis of narrative, even though the two terms are similar. The reason for this is that each method has its own procedures. In the case of the first type, narrative analysis, the researcher gathers the description of events through interviews and observations and develops them into narratives or stories, similar to the process of restoring. The story is the output of this type of research. The second type, analysis of narrative, is the process through which the researcher gathers stories as data, analyzes the topics or ideas that are common to them, and then reaches a description that applies to all the stories he has collected; that is, when the researcher uses this method, he writes a report or statement of common topics in these stories without paying attention to each particular story.

This research uses the first type, narrative analysis, in which the researcher writes a story as told by the participants using first-person narration after collecting data through interviews and observations. This is done to bring out the hidden curriculum that may appear in the school playground.

The researcher immersed himself in the school culture as a supervisor for three student teachers training at the school. He started collecting data in the second semester of 2018, namely on Tuesdays,

Wednesdays, and Thursdays, using observation and participant observations (Gay et al., 2012). The interviews, which lasted about an hour for each participant, were recorded and transcribed. The researcher attempted to engage in conversations and discussions with teachers from all disciplines in the teachers' room and the school principal's room. Additionally, he was actively involved in the morning line-up and even played football with students whenever possible. Along with the above activities, he joined the teachers in their weekly meetings outside school more than once in an attempt to gain the confidence of the teachers, a feature of narrative research (Gay et al., 2012).

The information and data are analyzed through narrative analysis, where the researcher gathers these separate data and information and transforms them into an integrated story, through which he reveals the main element or topic that appears via narration and is reflected in the experiences of the protagonist of the story, which in turn reflects a virtual reality, as said by (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Virtual reality is based on stories that look real or similar to reality that the reader knows from their own experiences and believes can happen. This virtual world that came in an artistic or literary form (Barone & Eisner, 2012) is similar to what they see in reality.

In this study, the researcher wrote four stories of four characters who talk about their lives, opinions, emotions, and impressions about the kind of experience Ahmad has encountered in the school playground. This is the hidden curriculum that the student may face, and which may affect the formation of their identity as a football player. The stories are written using the first person. When stories are told in the first person, they display the presence of voice and the use of expressive language (Eisner, 2002)“The kind of detachment that some journals prize- the neutralization of voice, the aversion to metaphor and to adjectives, the absence of the first person singular- is seldom a feature of qualitative studies. We display our signatures. Our signature makes it clear that a person, not a machine, was behind the words” (Eisner, 1998, p.36).

Theoretical Framework: Bruner's Antidotes

The "scientific method" dominated scientific research and increased the ability of humans to predict and control their environments, especially in the branch of natural sciences to the extent that the famous psychologist Jerome Bruner says it besieged us and led us to reject all forms of narrative truth. "We are finally in a time when the intolerable puritanism of scientific method is recognized as no less ideologically narrowing than the religious dogmas that it set out to destroy," says (Bruner (1996, p.149).

Bruner (1996) says that we are devoting great efforts to teaching scientific methods, mental thinking, and logic and how words can be converted into measurable hypotheses. He further says that this is the common model and approach in scientific research through which we can reach the truth. While we live most of our lives in a world shaped by narrative laws and tools, education, in Bruner's view, can offer great opportunities to create metacognitive, narrative sensitivity that can take us to the world of narrative truth (p. 149).

"We live in a sea of stories," says Bruner (1996) explaining that it is difficult for us to realize to dissect the narrative construal of reality. "Like the fish who (according to the proverb) will be the last to discover water, we have our own difficulties grasping what it is like to swim in stories" (p. 147). According to Bruner (1996), there are three classic antidotes that narratives or stories provide, which can help us create awareness of the importance of understanding this fact and discover that we are already swimming in a sea of stories.

The first of these three antidotes are contrast. Bruner says that listening to two different reports of the same story or event provides this contrast and makes us examine how these two people looked at the same event and how they differed in telling the story. Novelists, playwrights, and filmmakers use this method to increase the awareness of readers and viewers.

The second useful element that increases awareness is confrontation. It is a strong but risky medicine for unawareness. In this form of activity, your narrative version of reality clashes with someone else's reality claims. If you are not careful, confrontation is

more likely to cause anger and resentment instead of raising an awareness. This type of narration, according to Bruner, is very useful among friends and in some psychoanalysis sessions when its ultimate goal is to gain greater awareness.

The third antidote is metacognition. The purpose of thinking is thinking in this type of mental activity. This type is concerned with codes and linguistic symbols through which ideas are expressed and organized. While contrast and confrontation are concerned with the development of awareness about the relativism of knowledge, this type of activity is used for creating alternative ways of understanding the truth and how to make it, that is, it represents a mental basis for mutual negotiation with the other on the desired meaning. It is a way to achieve a common understanding, even when these negotiations fail to reach a consensus.

In other words, the use of story, which can be narrated through different characters, provides the contrast needed by the researcher and the virtual confrontation that presents different perspectives on the same problem. Also, the metacognitive element that goes beyond the event itself to the language used by each character who narrates the story and reveals the symbolic codes of meanings therein.

In the next section, which deals with the answer to the main question in the study, we will read four different stories that emerged as a result of the use of narrative analysis through which the researcher collected separate data and information and turned them into a complete story. The first story is about Ahmed, a sixth grader from a middle-class family who aspires to be a football player. The second is about Saleh, the teacher of physical education who recently moved to this school. The third story is about Sulaiman, the school principal with 20 years of experience as the leader of this school. The fourth story is about Abdurrahman, Ahmed's father, who works as an employee in the government sector for the municipality of the governorate where Ahmed's school is located.

Ahmed: “A Dream Deferred”¹

I am Ahmed. I'm 12 years old. My father used to tell me since I was in the fifth grade that I would be like Messi or Youssef Al-Thunayan². Messi is short and plays with his left foot and so do I. As for Youssef Al-Thunayan, I am, like him, an excellent dribbler and I always used to get past defenders easily. My father once witnessed me passing two older, bigger players by slipping the ball between their feet. I'll never forget his wide smile as he saw me engage these enormous guys in a ball fight. His words to me when I came home made me think of being a footballer in the future. The school team was relying on God and me to win any match organized by the Ministry of Education outside the school with other schools. I got the best player award last year in the school tournament that the school participated in. My mates were racing to join my team during physical education class at school because they knew my team would win. I found great happiness in that. But this unbridled desire of my classmates to play with me in every class has created enemies against me with those who do not play with me and with large bodies who use verbal and physical violence with me in every class. The new physical education teacher was busy all the time on his cell phone and didn't notice the roughness they showed while playing. He was unlike the previous physical education teacher who followed every small and big thing on the school playground as he used to play with us and whistle like the referee of official matches. As for this year, the senior students are the ones who rule the matches, and they miss many things and do injustice to the team that they do not play with. The violence of those older and bodied increased to the point where I had an ankle injury that prevented me from playing for two weeks after someone hit me on purpose after I crossed them in an embarrassing way. It was easy for him to stop me after he failed to stop the ball that went between his legs. The teacher did not notice this intentional roughness and no foul was given, to use football terminology, even though I fell

¹ A title of a poem by Langston Hughes

² One of the most talented footballers in Saudi Arabia.

to the ground and could not complete the class because of the pain. The rough student started giggling as the game went on, but the teacher didn't notice. The teacher, who was preoccupied with his phone, assumed that this was standard practice in football. He even told me to look for another game because of my small body. I was annoyed by what he said, but I had no ears for him. How can I hear his words when he leaves us on the field without a referee regulating the game and imposing order and justice? The other pupils didn't ask for anything since they were too terrified of those big pupils to speak up. These events multiplied, and chaos became the title of every session we play in. Previously, we had been eagerly awaiting this session. Now the situation has changed. The students no longer bothered to put on our sportswear for this class because our punishment was being denied play if we didn't bring our sportswear. And this punishment was exactly what we want. Some of us come without sportswear so we don't play. We just watch and hang around the playground watching those who play and chatting about issues and stories that have nothing to do with football. YouTube, PlayStation, and Anime are our main themes. We no longer talk about Al Hilal, Al Nasr, Al Ahly and Al Ittihad matches, or even Barcelona, Real Madrid, Liverpool and Manchester United. Perhaps themes like pigeons, rabbits and other animals in the desert became more attractive to us than football. Even those students who were wreaking havoc, injustice, and violence on the playground, lost their interest in this class and competed with us in our new topics. Perhaps the teacher Saleh was right. Football is not the best choice for me.

Saleh: “The Road Not Taken”³

I am Saleh, the physical education teacher in this school, which is located in the center of the Kingdom and is 400 km away from where my family lives. I am 25 years old and was appointed last year in a village about 50 km away from this school. At the start of this academic year, it was decided to move me to this school as a physical education instructor. I didn't like sports, but it was the work made available from which I made a living. I would have preferred to study

³ A title of a poem by Robert Frost

in another major, but my grades in the Evaluation test held by the Education and Training Evaluation Commission did not qualify me for a better major than this. I also dislike supporting sports, particularly football. The endless conversations about Al-Hilal, Al-Nasr, Al-Ittihad and Al-Ahly clubs do not impress me, and they are the last things I think of. Trips and travel are my favorites, as I take long school holidays to travel and short vacations for desert trips. My car is equipped with all the travel tools I need, and I often go with my friends on the picnics in the desert, away from the atmosphere of study and teaching. I am not a fan of reading and I do not want to buy any book, and my friends like me hate everything related to books, especially those that they ask you to read to improve our methods of teaching. Teaching is based on what you gain from practice and experience, not what you find in books. I have certain convictions about teaching that help me deal with students. For example, I think that the student needs to go through the study himself so that he does not depend on the teacher for everything. Students may sometimes be subjected to some harassment or bullying, but this is the nature of studying. It is best for students to face these situations on their own without the intervention of teachers. Due to the fact that I was not there on the school playground when his son was injured by another student, one of the parents complained to the administration against me. This parent does not know that this is part of the way I used to teach, which is to give students the opportunity to face problems on their own, because life is difficult and requires a person to depend on himself. Also, this is the nature of this sport. These events and injuries are inevitable. His son will not be a talented player in the future for the simple reason that his body is weak and short. It is true that he is talented as everyone says about him, but talent is not enough. I told the student that he should choose another individual game that does not require contact and strength and not violent football. Table tennis, for example. I told him that. I know that this kind of frankness with a student of his age may affect him a bit, but the truth is sometimes bitter. Older folks claim that firmness with the young is advantageous for him as he matures. The parent who complained to me said that I

was too busy on the mobile phone to follow up on his son. I don't know how the student's father knew that I was on the phone at the time. but it does not matter. Who does not use a cell phone at school? All teachers use it; I even see it daily. They use it while teaching in the classroom in more important subjects like math and science. Why do they focus on me when I teach a subject that is less important than the other subjects and is usually on the playground and the school yard and not in the classroom? Everyone here in this school, including the headmaster, is convinced that I am too busy to follow the students during classes and that I use the phone more during work. When I receive a message via WhatsApp, there is no harm in responding to it, especially since some messages are important, and the nature of the subject I teach allows me to do so. I'm starting to get kind of bored especially when everyone lays most of the blame on me. I am continuing with this work to earn a living and maybe change my profession when my financial condition improves and collect what I can to start a business or something other than teaching. Everything is frustrating here. Consider, for example, the headmaster who closes the attendance book when I'm a little late and threatens to file a report against me to the Education Office. He says leading the school assembly and sport drills in the morning is my responsibility. Any teacher can do this. why me? I live in an apartment for singles and sometimes I get late because there is no one to wake me up in the morning. If I had a good relationship with the manager, he wouldn't have said this. I'm not the type of person to flatter or show hypocrisy. I totally understand this headmaster. If you flatter him, he overlooks your mistakes. He does not care much about the interests of the students, but rather that the teachers submit to him and fear him. He treats us as if we are working at his father's school. This is a public school. His obnoxious manner sometimes makes me deliberately anger and provoke him despite the threat. Such an environment does not suit me, and I cannot adapt to it. I am eagerly waiting for the time they will allow me to apply for transfer to leave this school and get rid of its endless problems.

Sulaiman: “The Chief Conductor”⁴

I have been the headmaster of this school for twenty years. I belong to this area and live not far from the school. I know everything in and around it and the students and parents frequented by it. A lot of issues happen every year and we get over them with God's help and then because of the experience I gained over these years. I will retire in two years from now and be relieved of the heavy educational responsibilities that fall upon me. It is not easy to work as a school headmaster, as there is no difference between you and any other teacher in terms of salaries and allowances. Also, teachers are now reluctant to act as school headmasters and apologize for taking such a position in the school. The problems have increased recently for some reason I don't know. Perhaps because of the crazy age we are living in now and the fluctuations of social life we are witnessing today. Students and teachers are so immersed in new devices, smartphones, and the internet to the degree that I, for example, ask teachers to turn off their phones in every educational meeting with them, but in vain. Education has now bewilderingly declined and is no longer what it used to be. Teachers no longer appreciate the great responsibilities of the school headmaster, and the task of some has become to ignore the instructions he issues, which is in their best interest at first. What matters most to me as a school headmaster is that the teachers respect me and do what I say. Imagine, for instance, that you ask the teacher to put down his phone and pay attention to you, but he ignores your request instead of complying with a yellow smile, as happened with Saleh, the physical education teacher who constantly stays with him. This teacher is an example of a new generation of educators who use teaching strategies that the headmaster of the school detests. It wouldn't hurt if he listened to my words only formally. The most important thing for an employee is to show respect and appreciation to his superiors because when this characteristic of teachers is absent the school becomes a mess. And I don't allow it. Otherwise, I would not have remained more than 20 years as the headmaster of this school.

⁴ A title of a short story by John le Carre.

And the Education Office knows the experiences I have gone through. I haven't read a book on education for a long time. Books do not give you the experience you need to run an educational institution like this. Only practice and experimentation will give you the necessary experience. So, teachers like Saleh should know that a teacher who tries to ignore instructions I will write a report against him and remove him from my school immediately even if he is doing excellent in the classroom. The important thing here is the respect of the school headmaster. The Education Office will not refuse my request because they know that if they do, I will give them the key to this school to run it themselves. This teacher, whose name is Saleh, put us in an unenviable position in front of the Education Office because of his negligence and his use of the mobile phone throughout his class. A talented student named Ahmed was seriously injured because this badger teacher was busy with his phone and did not follow up his students. I could have contained the situation and stopped the complaint against him by the parent if this teacher had come to me personally and apologized to me expressing his regret for the indifferent attitude against me in previous situations and in meetings with teachers and showing remorse for all those situations in which he ignored my instructions. This simple crisis could have been overcome with the student Ahmed and his father; But unfortunately, he did not. I could have forgiven him for many things like assigning some students to lead on his behalf the morning assembly of the school when he's late or letting him out at the weekend when he asks to travel or go on his endless desert trips. There is no problem that I cannot solve. The most important thing for me as a school headmaster is that he respects me. Anything other than that can be forgiven. Who is the good teacher? He is the one who abides by the instructions issued by his superiors in the classroom with the students. He is the one who walks down the pre-carved path that all teachers and students walked through, and everyone knows it and does not deviate from it. Whoever tries to get out of it, and invents other ways and digresses, he has no one to blame but himself. As a school headmaster, I would prefer the teachers who work under me to behave in this way. When do teachers understand this?

Abdulrahman: “Father Time”⁵

I am Abdul Rahman, 42 years old, and I work as a government employee in the municipality of the city in which I live. I have five children, one of whom is Ahmed, who attends this public school close to home. Two other sons studied at this school, which we know very well and know its headmaster, Mr. Suleiman, for a long time. Things in this school were normal for a parent like me who has three sons studying there over the past years until my son Ahmed came from it one day limping due to an injury that happened to him during the physical education class while he was playing football with his peers. The physical education class was Ahmed’s favorite because he finds himself in it, as he is a talented player, according to the testimony of one of the local coaches who supervise the training of the junior team of one of the clubs that play in the Saudi Premier League in the region. This coach told me that he would be of a great value if he had enough care and training. I had taken Ahmed to this club after they announced that he would do a training session for young players in an attempt by this club to discover talented Saudi players who could play in it in the future. I am interested in sports, and football was and still is my favorite hobby like most Saudis, and I follow the Saudi League with interest, and its matches are our main concern in the rest house where we meet with friends to follow the matches. That is why I knew that Ahmed was a talented player and I used to watch him play and always encourage him and take him with me to attend some important league matches in the stadium. I even built a small playground in the house with one goal in order to practice his hobby and train in it, and sometimes I play with him myself as well as with his other two brothers. I watched him last year in a school match that was held during the break between two teams that reached the final. You can’t imagine how he performed in it. Despite his young age and small body, he played with his left foot in such a wonderful way that the teachers next to me expressed admiration for his performance and talent. He would push the ball through the opponent’s legs and run

⁵ A title of a poem by John Milton.

around him in the blink of an eye. Sometimes I called him Youssef, referring to Youssef Al-Thunayan. He watched clips of him on YouTube and loved him very much, and sometimes Messi, because he played with his left foot and his body was as small as him. I was very upset about what happened to Ahmed and complained against the teacher to the school administration after I learned the story from him. How does the teacher neglect to follow up on his students during the lesson, and spend most of the time on the mobile? The headmaster promised me that he would solve this problem. However, I do not think that such a matter can be resolved easily. Before Ahmed was injured, I noticed that his interest in football had retreated considerably, especially with the coming of this new teacher who was different from the previous one. He is no longer interested in attending matches in the stadium and is interested in electronic Sony games via the internet or watching anime series on his mobile. I was finding it very difficult to get him back to football to which he had lost his passion. I do not know why? Is the technology that has recently spread the reason? Are there any other reasons? The baffling thing is that he started a new hobby, which is raising rabbits on our small farm. When he is on the farm with me, he no longer plays football with his brothers as usual. He turns instead to these pets, and when he is at home he returns to electronic games and mobile devices. I tried a lot with him, but in vain. I began to think that what was happening on the school playground was the main reason Ahmed left football he was so passionate about. I did not study in an educational college, but from what I heard, I know that the new teacher contributed to this matter, and perhaps this is the reason for that, especially since he is still at school practicing the same usual methods. I went to the headmaster of the school again and did not find a satisfactory answer from him. He told me he'd do his best to try and fix it. He told me that people do not change overnight and that we must be patient. I left school worried about Ahmed thinking about his future and his ambitions.

Epilogue: The Researcher

Reading the four stories narrated by these four central figures reveals the hidden curriculum. These stories fulfill Bruner's three

antidotes to help create an awareness of the problem at hand (contrast, confrontation, and metacognition).

The element of contrast that this narrative methodology brings about is illustrated by the way Ahmed looks at the problem he is experiencing, which in turn differs from the way the physical education teacher interprets the same problem. That, in turn, differs from the way the headmaster is handling the problem. The headmaster is looking at the situation through the narrow angle of his management philosophy. As for Abdulrahman, the parent, he is focusing on the interest of his son and how he can get rid of the harm that can happen to him. This element, contrast, reveals how each party considers the same problem. This creates an awareness among the reader about the problem and helps him understand the roles played by every character in the story.

This type of narration also presents an element of confrontation, which usually disappears when other research tools are used. The reader can observe the great differences between these four characters in the way they approach this problem when listening to the narrative story of each of them. Therefore, the reader can, on the basis of their educational experience, judge this problem and find the appropriate solutions that best suits his context. This kind of research puts these people and their views in a direct confrontation with others, thus enabling the reader to form a clear vision of the situation, such as that of Sulaiman, the school principal. He is interested only in dealing with the teacher Saleh, regardless of the educational interest that requires intervention and trying to find a solution to the problem that has occurred.

The metacognitive aspect that this kind of narration unveils is apparent in bringing about the different beliefs adopted by each character, especially those adopted by the teacher Saleh and Sulaiman, the headmaster. This problem, which is related to Ahmad's sports identity as a promising footballer, is the result of the emergence of a negative hidden curriculum in the school playground. According to Jane Martin (1976), some of the things that can be done with a hidden curriculum once it is found is confronting it. "We can change our

practices, procedures, environments, rules and the like in an effort to root out those learning states we consider undesirable,” (p. 142). Ahmed did not reveal his attitude toward football as a hobby, and it seems, from the researcher's point of view, to have given up this hobby and talent as a result of the passive behavior of Mr. Saleh. Here, these four different narratives highlight the problem before the readers and leave them free to choose among the alternatives that can be sought to confront this problem by relying on their educational experience and understanding of these different situations.

The researcher does not interfere in the interpretation of the stories in this study. The researcher will not list the results and recommendations of the study as usually done in quantitative research because “great narrative is an invitation to problem finding, not a lesson in problem solving. It is deeply about plight, about the road rather than about the inn to which it leads” (Bruner, 2002, p. 20).

Literature celebrates imagination, multiple visions, interpretations, and personal interpretations that vary from person to person. Eliot Eisner says, “not all problems have one correct solution” (Eisner, 1998, p.82), unlike what can be seen in schools that teaches students that there is only one correct answer for each question and one correct solution for each problem.

Perhaps, the concept of “educational connoisseurship,” introduced by Eliot Eisner (1998), is useful in this respect because understanding the classes is very complicated. So, you need to understand the history of the educational situation and know something about the teacher, the school, and the values that matter in society to understand what you see in them (Eisner, 1998). “Our understanding of theories of teaching and learning, our views of what is important in the educational process, and our image of acceptable teacher-pupil relationships all come to bear upon what we are likely to notice and how we interpret it” (Eisner, 1998, p. 66).

In this study, four characters tell their stories about a major problem that the student Ahmed faced in the school playground. It is a problem that Ahmed spoke about using first person narration. Ahmed was not just speaking for himself but on behalf of thousands of students who go out of their classes to the school playground and face other hidden curricula that need to be revealed and confronted if harmful.

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