

The Hidden Curriculum

Brittney Friedman, General Studies Principal

Did you vote in the 2016-2017 election this past November? I'm sure many of you did. Did you know that all of our YDLV students also voted? They didn't vote Republican or Democrat; they voted for the new school mascot. We grappled with the idea of how to integrate the 2016 election season into our school for several weeks, until we realized that we wanted to be able to integrate real world learning for our students. So, on November 8, 2016, our Middle School students opened up the YDLV Campaign Headquarters to rally for our new school mascot! It was a tall order: Students were broken into teams and were given only two hours to put together posters, a campaign slogan, a digital presentation and a campaign speech to sell their mascot to the student population. Students worked diligently and efficiently under pressure. It was amazing to see students recognize their personal strengths, delegate and prioritize the requirements of the campaigns! The votes came in quickly, through the use of our electronic voting booths, and with reason for recount and assurance the votes were fair, the Eagles took the win over the Scorpions, Yellow Jackets and Coyotes.

At the beginning of the school year, during back to school night, we discussed the idea of a "hidden curriculum" that embraces life skills like collaboration, critical thinking, creativity and innovation that, taught alongside the core curriculum of math, writing, social studies and science, form the basis of a well rounded education. This is the curriculum that will provide our students with the skills they need to be career-ready in the 21st century. Effectively integrating the hidden and traditional curriculums requires some flexibility in how we approach learning and classrooms. While our Election Expo Day was a rousing success, the most important aspects of the event were the learning experiences that went beyond the traditional classroom. Students were able to collaborate with peers using a wide variety of media, exhibit informational literacy by researching relevant topics, practice public speaking to try and persuade an audience to their point of view, and so much more. There were no textbooks involved and the role of the teacher was far different than in a typical classroom. The students took the lead and executed a perfect learning opportunity for themselves and their peers. We were able to pack so much into a two hour program that we still talk about the educational experience today.

However, this was only the beginning. The Election Expo was only one in a series of initiatives designed to kickstart this culture shift throughout YDLV. Our teachers have been learning the concept of Visible Thinking, a project of Harvard University, and applying it in their classrooms. Visible Thinking is a process that allows students to think critically about subjects in the process of learning. Students' thoughts are documented and displayed throughout the classroom. Integrating thinking routines into lessons helps teachers better understand their students' needs and knowledge base, encourages participation and focus from everyone in the classroom, sets the tone for the unit or material taught, and drives the overall direction of the unit. Teachers have been implementing some Visible Thinking routines

into their classrooms and the feedback has been very positive. Teachers have been sharing their experiences with the thinking routines with each other, and we are starting to see a paradigm shift in the way we teach material.

Another application of the Hidden curriculum has been taking shape in the YDLV Middle school. The students have been working on the concept of a Fixed vs. Growth Mindset, based on the studies of Carol Dweck. People with a fixed mindset believe that their basic qualities are unable to change. They believe that people are innately talented and that natural ability can't be learned. People who share a growth mindset firmly believe that basic abilities can be developed through hard work. Growth mindset people can stretch themselves to learn anything, with time and practice. Teaching our middle school students to have a growth mindset encourages motivation, patience, and ultimately productivity. Our students are more willing to make mistakes and get back up again. They embrace frustration with the knowledge that they have the capability to teach their brains to learn anything. They are developing patience and understanding that not everyone learns at the same pace and reaching small milestones in their lives can always be celebrated.

Parallel to the importance of strengthening and focusing on our hidden curriculum, we've introduced several new academic programs this year to ensure we are providing high level resources for our diverse population of learners. For English Language Arts, we've implemented a new reading program, Reading A-Z, that offers differentiation, assessment, blended learning and a variety of resources for our teachers in grades K-3. The program includes an interactive student component, Raz Kids, that lets our students use e-readers and answer comprehension quizzes on a regular basis. This program has been a supplemental curricular resource for our Resource Room as well. Students needing support and monitoring have been using IXL to practice skills in Language Arts and Math. Our second and third graders will be implementing novel studies for the first time this year allowing them to explore literature at a deeper level. Additionally our fourth grade students will be using a Graphic Novel to support the curriculum goals. Students in fourth grade through middle school are using Wordly Wise for their vocabulary program this year. Wordly Wise is an online interactive leveled program that introduces high levels of vocabulary, supports reading comprehension, and writing and language development. In math, we've implemented a new program for all students called Math in Focus, a Singapore Math Program for grades K-5 and Middle School. Students also have access to an online interactive math program called Sumdog that has motivated our students to work on building math fluency in their foundational skills. This year, the teachers have been working collaboratively to map out our core curriculum using an online curriculum mapping tool. Currently, the general studies teachers are focusing on mapping out our customized science curriculum aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards. The curriculum mapper is designed to help teachers create a "plan board" for their lesson materials, and help them constantly reflect and adapt their lessons to meet the needs of their students.

As a school, we are constantly reflecting and evaluating what curricular programs and resources will be the best for our students. It is so important that our students are using programs that go hand in hand with implementing our hidden curriculum. These are only some the ways that the hidden curriculum is beginning to be implemented to help YDLV reach the whole child. At YDLV, we understand that educating children to be ready for the modern world asks for much more than just covering the core curriculum. The world our kids are growing up in is ever-changing and rapidly evolving; it requires our teachers to gain an in-depth knowledge of best practices, strategies and resources to adequately support the learning needs of all students. While no culture shift happens overnight, we are very proud of our faculty and students in the progress we've made this year. We will continue to pursue our hidden curriculum into the years ahead, keeping YDLV at the forefront of innovative learning and modern education.