Comparing Suburban School Culture in Metropolitan Hartford

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Defining Terms

- **Formal Curriculum**: courses of study offered by schools to students as approved by school boards and listed in school documents.

- **Hidden Curriculum**: unstated norms, values, and beliefs that are transmitted to students through administrators and faculty.
Significance

- Philip Jackson (1968) *Life in Classrooms*
- Jean Anyon (1980) *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*
- Void in the literature
- Underconceptualized
- New forums for discussion
Research Question:

How does formal and hidden curriculum vary across two Metropolitan Hartford High Schools?
Regarding the formal curriculum, the two schools offer virtually the same content. However, the curricular tracks are not the same. School As’ tracks are college and non-college oriented, while school B offers non-college tracks.

Regarding the hidden curriculum, school As’ staff emphasize students’ creative thought and independence. While school Bs’ staff emphasize teachers’ authority and student discipline and order.
Methods

- Obtained permission from Institutional Review Board
- High Schools chosen at Random among 19 towns with one high school in the Metropolitan area
- Set up a contact at both suburban schools
- Thick description of the overall school environment and selective verbatim in the classroom
- Observed 6 mixed grade and level English classes at each school
Town Demographics

- Very similar racial demographics
- Significant difference in Educational attainment and median income
School Demographics

- Very similar racial demographics and per pupil expenditure

- Significant difference in Student course enrollment, Performance and activities of graduates
Formal Curriculum

- **Course Catalogs**
- **Course Leveling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Advanced Placement</th>
<th>School A</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Accelerated</td>
<td>School B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>College Preparatory</td>
<td>Above Average Ability</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Average Ability</td>
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<td>Individual small group help</td>
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Hidden Curriculum

- Enforcement of school rules
- Display Cases
- Guidance Office
- Classroom Setup
- Work processes in the classroom
Conclusions

While both schools offer virtually the same course content the leveling of courses place their students on different tracks.

School As’ staff emphasize students’ creative thought and independence in and outside of the classroom. While school Bs’ staff emphasize teachers’ authority and student discipline and order.