

HIDDEN CURRICULUM OR THE POWER OF THE SIDE EFFECTS IN SCHOOL EDUCATION

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Abstract: Every recurring characteristic of school life influences students’ beliefs, behavior, and attitudes towards education, norms and symbolic models in society. The unofficial, unwritten, often unintended or unconscious “messages” in educational environment, all things that are learnt in school in the process of relationships in addition to the official curriculum are defined as hidden curriculum. Hidden curriculum is acknowledged as the socialization process of schooling.

Some of characteristic and the types of hidden curriculum as aspects of symbolic human environment are maintained over time; others have changed or are reconstructed. This paper is aimed to present some key aspects of hidden curriculum that play a major part in development of students and often contradict the officially declared goals for the development of originality, creativity, self-regulated learning.

The analysis is focused on different features of the educational process that lead to passive acceptance and do not promote active learning and understanding. The negative cognitive and affective effects on outcome of students coming from “philosophy of collecting”, “right answerism” are discussed. The importance of powerful knowledge that develops critical awareness of the forces structuring the life is emphasizes.

The teaching strategies, teachers’ expectations and their interpretive schemes, hidden curriculum of language, hidden criteria of assessment are discussed in the context of their effect on students’ living approach and attitudes to learning.

The symbolic features of relationships and physical environment are analyzed. The silent messages from educational space are important not only for cognitive development, but also for socialization of students as active persons or as dependent followers of rules.

Hidden curriculum occurs not only through the actions of teachers and the official institutions. Students’ attitudes to learning give additional characteristics of it, both with positive and negative effects. In the time of digital transformation of culture the changes coming from students’ activities and attitudes are very important.

The analysis and conclusions are made on the base of key types of hidden curriculum described by different researchers, observations and focus groups involving students from Faculty of Education, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridsky”.

Keywords: hidden curriculum, socialization, culture of learning, cognitive and affective outcomes

1. INTRODUCTION

Everyday events in classroom, every recurring characteristics of school life influence students’ beliefs, behaviour, and attitudes towards education, norms and symbolic models in society. The unofficial, often unintended or unconscious “messages” in educational environment, all things that are learnt in school in the process of relationships in addition to the official curriculum are defined as hidden curriculum. It is an „unwritten curriculum“ described by informality and lack of conscious planning, includes norms, values, intergroup relations, ideology that enables students’ socialization process. Different aspects and effects of hidden curriculum are the object of an analysis by different authors. Broad-based reviews and analyses systematize different approaches to the concept (Meighan, 1993; Margolis et al., 2001). Some of approaches outline social consequences of schooling for cultural reproduction and social inequalities. Others are focused on characteristics of the process of teaching and learning that affect students’ living approaches, culture of learning and attitude to education. Some of characteristic and the types of hidden curriculum are maintained over time; others have changed or are reconstructed. It is important to disclose and consider some traditional key aspects of hidden curriculum that remain intact and some new feature which often contradict the officially declared goals for the development of originality, creativity, self-regulated learning.

2. HIDDEN CURRICULUM IN THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION

As it is known, Phillip Jackson (1968) in his book “Life in Classrooms” uses the term hidden curriculum to describe features of classroom life that were inherent in the social relations of schooling. He set out “three R’s” – Rules, Routines and Regulations that students must be learn in order to survive comfortably in most classrooms. Jackson argues that facing the existing rules, regulations and routines lead to various pupil responses and strategies like conformism, “resignation” and even “masquerade” (Meighan, 1993: 72). Characteristics of process of school education that make hidden curriculum are added and expanded by different theoreticians and researches with including standard teaching and learning activities, teaching strategies, the teachers’ exercise authority, relationships, teachers’ use of language, textbooks, assessment criteria and procedures (Margolis, et al. 2001; Kentli, 2009). Negative consequences of some of these traditional practices are *cognitive and affective*. Simple reproduction of unrelated fragments of information not only leads to unsystematic and non-functional knowledge, but also distorts attitudes towards learning and education. In systematization of influences of the hidden curriculum characteristics’ on the attitudes of students, Postman and Weingartner highlighted several important implications of undeclared but prevalent reproductive strategies in training. Among consequences in terms of attitude absorbed of the hidden curriculum, they point out that instead of creativity student may well learn that: “Passive acceptance is a more desirable response than criticism”; “Recall is the highest form of intellectual achievement, and collection of unrelated facts is the goal of education”, “There is always a single, unambiguous “Right Answer” to a question” (citing Meighan, 1993: 66-67). As a result school creates passive followers of rules, dependent personalities who are unable to draw on their own resources.

Different changes shaped the education now in order to develop students’ originality, flexibility, self-regulated learning. Despite the paradigm shift from teacher-centered towards child-centered and that there are more positive patterns of hidden curriculum, some of negative forms continue to exist (Oron Semper, J. & M. Blasco, 2018). First year students in Faculty of Education (fields: Education, Social Work, and Non-formal Education) who were involved in focus groups discussing issues of hidden curriculum report that one of the most common examples of the hidden curriculum in high school is the requirement for simple reproduction of information. This promotes surface approach to learning with minimum understanding and impedes development and usage of deep strategies in learning. And along with the negative cognitive outcome, the side affective effect is in development of “philosophy of accumulation” and passive acceptance. The negative effects increase with the widespread “*right answerism*”. This is a strategy to obtaining an approved response. The strategy has short-term value but, in the long term reduces learning and social relationships (Meighan, 1993:72). The pursuit of a one right answer leads to the simplification of reality and an inability to perceive contradictions in different life situations. The discussing and considering different alternatives and choices is towards a culture of learning, aimed at tools for analysis, understanding and actions in situations of complex nature, where decisions can be different and with varying degree of effectiveness. New realities, the needs of innovation-driven growth require dealing with urgent and increasingly complex problems (e.g., health, environment, resources, crime) and the educational challenge is not simply understanding and integrating vast sources of information but making productive use of knowledge resources to create new knowledge (Goldman & Scardamalia, 2013: 256).

The assessment criteria have effect not only on what students learn but *how* they learn. The explicit criteria influence students’ approaches to learning and their self-evaluating. The *hidden criteria* (as students and observations show) lead to uncertainty and impede the formation of self-identity. In the context of assessment two controversial trends occur. One of them is related to the fear of mistakes. It leads to the avoidance of difficulties not only in learning but also in life. Another trend is related to *grade and praise inflation*. The grade inflation means that the grades and the achievements they reflect has been changing in a downward direction over the time – the grades are higher than real achievements. The effect on socialization is in devaluation of the meaning of the effort, of the real knowledge and skills. The unreal praise, the “over-praise” has inverse power. Meta-analysis of 150 praise studies made by Scholars from Reed College and Stanford found that “heavily-praised students” become risk-averse and lack perceived autonomy. They are abstaining to commit to something because they are afraid of not succeeding (Bronson, P. & A. Marryman 2009).

It is important to pay attention to hidden curriculum through *teachers’ language*. The use of *dichotomies* (good/bad; black/white; strong/weak; fast/slow...) affects attitudes to see the world in opposite, polar dimensions. The use of *language of conflict or of negotiation* also influences general life skills and interpersonal life skills. The teachers are mediators of culture. Their implicit moral theories are social and moral lessons in education. Implicit

theories concerning the human qualities are known to have a powerful impact on motivation and learning, but their role in moral education is an under-researched topic (Rissanen et al. 2017). *Teachers' expectations* and *teachers' interpretative schemes* in relation to students' background, parents' education, general characteristics of conditions of life, some peculiarities of child behavior could lead to incorrect ideas about the abilities of children and to self-fulfilling prophecy.

The "*messages from space*" present the hidden curriculum of educational buildings. Different research found that buildings and classrooms have "factory design". There are differences and attempts to create more comfortable space for learning, exciting and stimulating environment and atmosphere in some schools. But in many schools the allocation of space and facilities suggests a sense of subordination, of asymmetrical relationships, of obedience and tacit compliance. Despite official declaration about collaborative working in small groups, the buildings obstruct co-operative relationships (Meighan, 1993: 79-81).

To disclose hidden curriculum requires analysis of *implicit biases in textbooks and course materials*. Sometimes there are messages that promote acceptance of violence as a way of goals achieving, suggest prejudices regarding social and cultural differences.

3. STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND RESPONSE TO LEARNING AS HIDDEN CURRICULUM

Students encounter norms, values, and beliefs through practices and daily routines in school. But their attitudes formed in the family and among groups of peers, in specific subcultures also affect characteristics of hidden curriculum. The synthesis of different views about students' influence shows that they are often contradict expected norms and dispositions that pervade the schools; students negotiate, reject and often divert socialization agendas (Margolis et al., 2001).

Some of important ways of students influence could be summarized as:

- Students' attitudes to learning and education
- "Easy culture" and searching of easy paths to success
- Digital habits
- The dynamics of age development and status inconsistency

Some of the students participate in learning mainly to *avoid disagreeable consequences*: low marks, non-promotion, derision, censure and despite of the idea about life-span education, have an attitude that learning is *a temporary nuisance* that the school imposes but that most adults are free from it, and that "*trading for grades*" is more important than learning to think (Meighan, 1993). These attitudes obstruct deep learning. To overcome this situation the school has to maintain high standards of quality.

"*Easy culture*" is a characteristic of contemporary situation. Many young people are involved superficially in many activities, are often quickly disappointed and search easy paths to success. If the schools could not offer meaningful activities and tasks, opportunities students to find own value, the situation will become more complicated.

Now day's children and young people are *always online*. Today's children plunge into the magic of the Internet. The chaotic mixing of facts, opinions, unrelated messages, the over-stimulation restrict thinking, provoke taking for granted the information from various sources. "How can we balance use of authoritative information with blind acceptance of whatever textbooks or websites present so that students do not meekly accept authoritative pronouncements?" (Goldman & Scardamalia 2013: 260) It is necessary the education to develop skills for constructive use of information from reliable sources and to develop evidence-based arguments and transliteracy. The term *transliterations* (Alan Liu, 2005) characterizes the ability to produce coherent integration of information from diverse sources. Transliteration is knowledge transformation processes: working with complex configurations of diverse ideas, *going beyond given information*, searching for and reading authoritative source information and finding promising ideas, creating explanatory coherence, and so forth (Goldman & Scardamalia 2013: 262).

According to Hurrelmann and Quenzel (2015) a structural characteristics of adolescents' life are status insecurity and status inconsistency. The status passage does not lead to any fixed endpoint and the transition from adolescence to adulthood occurs at different points in time within the individual developmental areas. Adolescents typically participate at a very early stage in some areas; in other areas their participation is delayed. We could say that the achieving maturity is delayed. Adolescents have to develop a personality structure that puts them in a position to respond to rapidly shifting social, cultural, economic and ecological conditions. By challenging activities that promote taking responsibility education has to support this process.

4. POSITIVE FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOL CULTURE

The types and aspects of hidden curriculum are different in different schools. The analyzed characteristics are the most common in many schools. In some schools, positive features of the hidden curriculum predominate as a peculiarity of school culture. School related social support from teachers, classmates, and parents influence students' life satisfaction, school satisfaction, scholastic competence, and general self-efficacy. Mutual fostering the effort and productivity has an effect not only in school, but in life beyond classroom. Supporting successful personal change and improvement efforts has long-term effects for teachers and for students. Interaction and partnership regardless of social status influence confidence and resilience in situations requiring difficult decisions. And when more teachers and students find meaning in what they do, satisfaction and a sense of growth affects everyone else. The acknowledgement of achievements both in school and out of school creates sense of well-being. And the sense of community is always inspiring.

5. CONCLUSION

The concept of hidden curriculum is very useful as a theoretical framework for exploring the social functions of education. Hidden curriculum is difficult to define explicitly because it varies among the students and their experiences and because it is constantly changing as the knowledge and beliefs of society evolve. But some of characteristics of the process of education revealed by different researches and observations highlight the contradictions between explicit and tacit curricular goals. Although the role of teachers and students are changed significantly in contemporary education, some patterns of hidden curriculum are maintained over time. The reproductive strategies that predominated in teaching and learning, information overload, lack of connectivity between different facts and ideas, hidden criteria of assessment, lack of polylogue in the classroom promote passive acceptance and resistance. The effects on students' values and beliefs are cumulative. The discussed patterns of hidden curriculum obstruct obtaining of powerful knowledge enables students "to transcend the limitations of everyday experience and develop critical awareness of the forces structuring their lives" (Hodgkins, 2015: 87).

To expose the characteristics of hidden curriculum is very important to deal with it. It will be useful for teachers' self-reflection. The new trends related to easy-culture, always online students' position, information overload by different sources need to engage students in transformative learning, leading to critical and analytical thinking, to develop ability for active participation in complex challenging situations. It is necessary students to develop skills for constructive use of information from reliable sources, to obtain transliteracy and ability to develop evidence-based arguments.

The meaningful tasks, the thrill of the application that makes the world of the child more comprehensive and exciting influence the motivation for knowledge, in-depth learning and personal growth.

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