

Hidden curriculum argumentative essay



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Duncan University of Phoenix EDD 558 Jennifer Wordell Monday, June 12, 2006
Hidden Curriculum; Forces That Impact Instruction
Students who go to college to become teachers are taught a general course of subject matter that when they become teachers they will teach to their students. They are given new ways to teach the same curriculum that has been taught for generations. Once known as the 3 R's (reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic), this curriculum is known or explicit, it is written down and they are conscious of what it is that should be taught. However, another curriculum not known or implicit, a hidden curriculum, has been taught to these student/teachers and they will teach it to their students. Hidden curriculum deals with school culture and the values being espoused.

The basic idea behind the concept of the hidden curriculum is that pupils learn things that are not actually taught in the formal curriculum and, in this respect, the concept of a hidden curriculum refers to the way the learning process is organized. There are two schools of thought regarding hidden curriculum, one is negative and one is positive. John Taylor Gatto is one educator twice recognized as New York's Teacher of the Year, who believes that the hidden curriculum corrupts rather than enhances students in public education; The current debate about whether we should have a national curriculum is phony. We already have a national curriculum locked up in the seven lessons (hidden curriculum) I have just outlined. Such a curriculum produced physical, moral, and intellectual paralysis, and no curriculum of content will be sufficient to reverse its hideous effects....

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Schools teach exactly what they are intended to teach and they do it well: how to be a good “ Egyptian and remain in your place in the pyramid...”(Gatto, 1993). Whitty and Young say the same thing that Gatto says only they look at it as a positive lesson. What is important about what pupils learn in school is not primarily the ‘ overt’ curriculum of subjects like French and Biology, but values and beliefs such as conformity, knowing one’s place, waiting one’s turn, competitiveness, individual worth and deference to authority. The hidden curriculum teaches pupils ‘ the way life is’ and that education is something that is done to them rather than something which they do.

The prevailing values of society are ‘ picked-up’ by pupils. ” (Whitty & Young 1976) The hidden curriculum in public schools is based on the values, attitudes and abilities of society. When society changes so does the hidden curriculum. The standard curriculum is clearly understood by all; it is generally presented in student handbooks and other publications.

The hidden curriculum, however, consists of the unwritten, unspoken rules of school. It is the hidden curriculum that defines each school’s unique culture. This culture makes each school an individual institution with specific expectations for each member of the community. The school’s hidden curriculum is its culture and includes shared norms, values, beliefs, traditions, rituals, and customs. Your child is tested on his academic skills every few days, but his social interactions are “ tested” and evaluated hundreds of times each day. Did he raise his hand to ask a question? Did he ask permission to get out of his seat? Did he complete his work neatly and in a timely manner? These are all lessons in the hidden curriculum.

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The performance of teachers in classrooms is one of the factors that determine hidden curriculum, and has an important place in ethical education. Teachers convey social and moral messages through punishing or rewarding students in line with the rules that they set up and by the way of authority. While the official curriculum declares that courses will be carried on in a democratic manner and that the students will be encouraged to think creatively, the school's conventions emphasize the use of authority. Usually, when educators refer to school curriculum, they have explicit, consciously planned course objectives in mind. In contrast to this didactic curriculum, students experience an "unwritten curriculum" characterized by informality and lack of conscious planning. In fact, "all students must internalize a specific program of social norms for raising in order to function effectively as members of a smaller society, the school, and later on as productive citizens of the larger American society" (Wren, 1993, p3).

Individual classroom management and teacher instruction develops the classroom culture and teaches the students what it is they are allowed to do, and what things will get them punished. This classroom culture is shaped the same way every year by the same educators. It may vary slightly due to professional development and maturity on the teacher's part, but basically it stays the same. The teacher runs the classroom and teaches the students inadvertently how to learn, and how to get along in society.

Students quickly learn which teachers are more insistent than others about conforming to classroom rules, who are more adept at catching them cheating on tests, and who are more gullible about accepting homework excuses. No one ever explains these things to them, yet students readily

adjust their behavior according to those expectations, knowing what the consequences are likely to be, and are prepared to make those choices seemingly without effort. Most teachers have never been educated on the hidden curriculum, the rules are handed out to them, and they pass them on to the students. What they teach, where they teach it, and how they teach it are told to them by the administration of the school. Thus, teachers' and administrators' interactions with students help shape attitudes and ideals (Henry, 1955).

The administration is the catalyst to the development of the school culture and climate. Every school has unspoken rules that impact everything from navigating the campus and classroom layout to the schedule and the social scene. How the administrator runs the school will determine the norms developed and followed by the majority of the students. How are patterns of power currently determining the student's experience of schooling, and constructing the student's image of self, others, and the world? Curricular form determines what students can and cannot experience, and the ways in which they can and cannot act, and in the words of Aristotle, ' It makes no small difference whether we form habits of one kind or another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference' (Seaton, 2002). Administrators who are aware of the unwritten curriculum that pervades in their schools will be able to control it and not allow it to control them. Those administrators who work against the school culture take on the responsibility of uncertainty, negativity and chaos.

These administrators try to make changes “ overnight” instead of using the ongoing school climate to benefit their leadership, they rage against it,

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causing dissention among the students, parents, and teachers. Leadership and the tone that is used will determine school culture and climate, whether it be positive, happy, and inviting, or negative, unjust, and chaotic. More than what educators say, more than what they write in curriculum guides, evaluation practices tell both students and teachers what counts. How these practices are employed, what they address and what they neglect, and the form in which they occur speak forcefully to students about what adults believe is important. (Eisner, 1991, p. 81) How administrators deal with fairness, respect, honesty, respectfulness, caring, and inquisitive minds will determine how important these things are to the students and how successful the school will be at producing good citizens who will contribute to society and make our world a better place.

This is truly the responsibility of public education whether it is written or not.

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