

# The teacher's role in the hidden curriculum



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Schools spend a valuable time and effort in planning the formal curriculum. They develop systems for effective implementation of the designed curriculum; and then they devise methods of formative, as well as summative evaluation to find out, if the objectives set are achieved or not. But one important aspect of curriculum which is never documented, consciously implemented or evaluated is the hidden curriculum.

'The hidden curriculum also involves learning but no school board ever sets it,' [Ortberg: 2009: 49]. School is a place where curriculum is enacted whether formal (intentional) or hidden (inherent), but this is also a place where all the aspects of curriculum enactment are not fully recognised or credited. In the words of Philip W. Jackson (1990) who first used the term 'Hidden Curriculum':

'School is a place where tests are failed and passed, where amusing things happen, where new insights are stumbled upon, and skills acquired. But it is also a place in which people sit, and listen, and wait, and raise hands, and pass out paper, and stand in line, and sharpen pencils. School is where we encounter both friends and foes, where imagination is unleashed and misunderstanding brought to ground. But it is also a place in which yawns are stifled and initials scratched on desktops,...

A lot more is transmitted than what the teachers plan and teach. Teaching and learning is packed in the teacher's attitude towards students, the class ethos, the students' perception of the educator and the students' perception of the school. The packaging teaches a lot more than what is packed

(intentionally taught). We don't teach the hidden curriculum but it ' just leaks out' [Ortberg: 2009: 49] of us.

The purpose of this study is to examine why students like some subjects more than the others and which factors related to the teaching strategies and the teacher's personality impact their likings.

By examining their reasons for liking different subjects we catch a glimpse of the hidden curriculum playing its part.

Hidden curriculum as defined by sociologists is the ' informal and non-intentional learning within the school,' [McNeil: 1981: 236].

Before education was institutionalized, learners acquired it by visiting and living with scholars over long periods of time. The scholars did not just teach the ' doctrine' but they also taught the ' life' itself. They never stopped teaching. The non-teaching time, when they could be themselves, was non-existent. The ' line between teaching moments and ' just living' got wonderfully blurred' [Ortberg: 2009: 52]. As a result congruence was created between teaching and learning and between formal and hidden curriculum. Or it would be better to say that there was no hidden curriculum at all.

With industrialization came the factory model schools. Religion was excluded from all rooms and confined to its period only. Facts were transmitted ' to rows of quiet, submissive students...'[Wren: 1999: 594]. This was the time when hidden curriculum came into existence, divorced from formal curriculum. Since that time the laments about the decline of moral character of students seem to grow louder year after year.

Understanding the hidden curriculum is extremely important for all educators, in order to perform effectively. Wren (1999) explicates, ' Greater understanding of the hidden curriculum will help educators to achieve the goal of providing effective schools in the 21st century.'[pg. 596]

One aspect of the hidden curriculum is the teachers' biases, racism and partiality. If they are not aware of them and they don't self monitor and control them, the biases are instilled into their students. In turn the students express these biases to the fellow students and create ' social class divisions' and reinforce ' gender and racial inequalities' [Hemmings: 2000: 9].

Martinson (2003) in his study of hidden curriculum in the social studies classrooms concludes that teachers must ' provide students with the motivation and tools that will allow them to participate more actively in public life'. The same is true for all subjects. The teachers must consciously control the hidden curriculum and equip students with tools that will enable them to be active citizens of the world contributing whatever they can for its betterment and development.

Atherton (2011) explains through the following diagram how the hidden curriculum (the unintended message) can be beneficial, detrimental or irrelevant for the formal curriculum (intended message).

My description of the role of the teacher in the hidden curriculum is based on the data collected by administering a questionnaire to a class of 27 students (present on that day) where I wanted to study the impact, at a local school.

The students are all boys coming from medium to high socio economic background. Their teachers are well versed in their content knowledge and attend professional development workshops at least twice a year as part of the school policy.

After careful and thorough content analysis of the collected data the key themes that emerged are tabulated in the appendix.

After careful study of the students' responses I conclude that teachers play a major role in the implementation of the curriculum. They play their part not only in the explicit, overt or formal curriculum but also in the implicit, covert, unintended or hidden curriculum.

Just because of the teachers learners like or dislike a subject. They like a subject, when the teachers' explanations are well structured, incorporating fun elements that interest the students; when the explanations are embellished with interesting examples, stories or anecdotes.

Students find a subject interesting when the teacher repeats the explanations several times without being sarcastic or rude. Moreover they like a subject when teachers revise the explained matter again and again. They find a subject interesting when teachers incorporate games and fun activities in it.

The students like a teacher for reasons that are not explicit part of the formal curriculum. This liking is all based on the implicit or hidden curriculum.

Students of the class under study like their teachers when they explain everything well, repeating as needed and then revising often. The students

felt that these strategies help them learn things better. They also considered good use of the chalk-board for drawings and explanations as a strategy that help them learn better. Politeness and being fair are also qualities that are valued by these students.

The activities which interest the under study class are fun worksheets, art work, social studies worksheets, reading, learning and experiments. In general the activities they like most are the ones in which they are physically involved. Most of them like physical activities and revision games. Thus they also like activities that engage them intellectually and are fun as well.

The students consider all of the above qualities necessary for making a lesson interesting. They find a lesson boring when a lesson doesn't meet the above criteria.

They think that a lesson is boring when the explanation is not clear, is devoid of fun and is delivered in a very serious (gloomy) tone of voice. When a traditional teacher reads and explains and then gives a lot of written work, they consider it boring. When a teacher explains only once and doesn't review, they feel that the class is boring.

An interesting finding was that they do their work regularly for two major reasons. They do it because the teacher is strict with the rules and requirements or the teacher gives them some physical punishment if they don't.

A few students do their work because they like the subject or they find it difficult and boring.

All of the above responses are a manifestation of the hidden curriculum that 'leaks' from the teachers and their teaching strategies. Even when teachers do not plan to develop the students' attitudes towards their subjects they package their messages in attitudes. These attitudes may enhance or hamper the students' learning. Therefore it is highly recommended that all teachers remember the hidden side of their teaching.

Being aware of the hidden side of teaching will help teachers to incorporate it in their planning and start decreasing the gap between the formal and the hidden curriculum. This will in turn make the students' learning congruent with what is intentionally taught, reducing the hidden aspect of the curriculum more and more.