

The Hidden Curriculum

‘The Hidden Curriculum refers to the unwritten, unofficial and often unintended lessons, values and perspectives that students learn in school’ (www.eduglossary.org, 2015). Jerald (2006), as cited by Alsubaie (2015) further explains that The Hidden Curriculum is ‘conveyed or communicated without intent; it is conveyed indirectly by words and actions that are parts of the lives of everyone in a society.’ This links to Bandura’s Theory of Social Learning (1997), which suggests that people learn behaviour from watching and imitating others. The Hidden Curriculum is not taught officially in educational settings, but aspects of it are embedded into the ethos of many schools. Hughes (2010) suggests that The Hidden Curriculum is ‘picked up’ rather than learnt but it does have to permeate the whole life of a school to be effective. The Hidden Curriculum incorporates values such as respecting authority, respecting diversity and multiculturalism, punctuality, aspiring to achieve and having a work ethic. However, it also refers to the physical learning environment, the relationship between children and staff in the educational settings and the overall atmosphere, or climate within the classroom (eduglossary.org, 2015)

The Official (Formal) Curriculum

The National Curriculum was first introduced in 1988 and published schemes of work that set out what children needed to learn and when (Hughes, 2010). However, Merry (1998) suggested that the National Curriculum took the focus away from child-centred learning and placed emphasis on attainment and test grades. A formal curriculum will always have to be followed due to publication of results, but a new ‘Successful Futures’ curriculum introduced by Graham Donaldson in 2015 encourages children to be more independent and capable learners. According to Welsh Government (2017), this new curriculum should be applied throughout Wales by January 2022.

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Behaviour Management

Thompson (2017) questions the validity of the ‘Hidden Curriculum’, as rules and expected standards of behaviour are usually written down and displayed around the school for all to see. Very often, these rules and ‘Codes of Conduct’ are part of Homework Planners or Home-Link books and so can be classed as part of the ‘Formal’ or ‘taught’ curriculum. Behaviour management is an important part of school life, as unless a teacher can manage the behaviour of a particular class, he or she cannot fulfil their role as educator (Cowley, 2010). Positive behaviour management is most effective as a whole school ethos and uses a reward system to encourage desirable behaviour in children and young people. This technique links to Skinner’s Theory of Operant Conditioning which was introduced in 1948. Skinner suggests that behaviour followed by pleasant consequences is more likely to be repeated whereas behaviour followed by negative responses will cease to occur (McLeod, 2018). Cultural factors have an effect on behaviour, as acceptable actions vary from culture to culture and even between adults and children, males and females of the same social groups (Project 2061, 1990). Children from Korean or Chinese backgrounds tend to be more passive in conversations as they are very concerned with authority. This could affect their communication skills in the classroom as they would be more reserved by nature.

Classroom Climate.

‘A positive classroom climate feels safe, respectful, welcoming, and supportive of student learning’ (Kamb, 2012). Clear rules and boundaries, which are consistently and constantly enforced, ensure that all children understand what behaviour is expected of them. Kamb (2012) states that ‘having classroom rules helps you create a predictable, safe learning environment for your students...they are able to focus better on learning’. All pupils should feel respected within the classroom environment and fully part of the community within the classroom. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943) suggests that children need to have their basic needs met before they are ready for learning. Basic needs refer to food, warmth and security as well as friendship and close relationships; these relationships can be formed with both peer groups and staff members. It is important that staff members within the setting communicate effectively and appropriately to each other and to the children they look after. Teachers shape pupil behaviour by their own actions and so should act as good role models for their students (Intervention Central, no date). A positive classroom climate is one which favours children with sporting abilities as well as the mostly academic children. A culture that develops positive images and empowers all children fosters higher levels of self-esteem (Brodie and Savage, 2015)

Dominant Values.

‘A school is, essentially, concerned with values...those held to be important by society’ (Halstead and Taylor, 1996, pp.148). However, it is likely that schools will include values specific to their needs and dependent on the communities they cater for. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) suggests that moral values are reproduced by society and passed on through generations. Lower-class citizens, seemingly in a cycle of unemployment, must strive to achieve educational success. Based on this idea, Taylor (2012) states that ‘few people chose their values. Instead they simply adopt the values of their parents and the dominant values of society’. Taylor (2012) also suggests that a person’s value is dictated by their success, as the more wealth and status a person has makes them more successful. It is socially unacceptable to be ‘poor’ or powerless. Heilman (2011) also suggested that upper class students benefit more from the hidden curriculum as they learn critical thinking and problem solving skills. Children from lower class schools value obedience and rote learning over independent learning. Dominant values include wearing uniform, which makes everybody equal in an educational setting but also prepares children for the world of work. In some instances, staff members will wear the school uniform too, in order to promote a sense of cohesion throughout the setting. Uniform shows that everybody is the same, and children will not be embarrassed if they wear different brands of clothing to their peers. Most schools sell good-quality second hand uniform for as little as £1 per item, which means it is affordable for most families. Refugee children, or those from families seeking Asylum are given free uniform to help them settle in more quickly and to feel part of the school.

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