

The Hidden Curriculum and the Development of Latent skills: The Praxis

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Received: March 29, 2020

Accepted: May 15, 2020

Online Published: May 20, 2020

doi:10.5430/jct.v9n2p70

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/jct.v9n2p70>

Abstract

The paper sought to explore the extent to which the hidden curriculum also referred to as the collateral curriculum can be used to develop skills, values and attitudes for learners to inculcate in order to develop the affective domain. Primarily, education is supposed to ensure the holistic development of any individual with a balanced development of all the domains. However, current educational policies and their implementation overemphasise the development of intellectual abilities to the detriment of, especially, the affective domain due to narrow and restrictive accountability practices. Since learners learn more than what they are taught in class and what they acquire from the school's culture stays much longer with them, it is reasonable they are given the opportunity to explore in order to create a school environment and a culture that would effectively evolve such soft skills and affective elements for learners. Various aspects of school life from which affective elements can be practically derived have been discussed with its attendant educational policy implications.

Keywords: hidden curriculum, affective elements, soft skills

1. Introduction

Since time immemorial education has been a trilogy; for the transmission of knowledge, acquisition of skills and inculcation of values and attitudes. It is in this breathe that developers of educational programmes or curricula have provided content and experiences that cater for these triadic constituents, that further promote the three developmental faculties - cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains of learners. However, over the past few decades, in Ghana as in other parts of the world, there has been concerns regarding overemphasis on the acquisition of knowledge skewed towards the development of the intellectual faculties. Sager (2013) bemoans the development of learners in the education space as a formalized standardized intellectual activity. There is thus a failure to pay attention to instilling affective elements and non-cognitive skills resulting in the inability of schools and educational systems, as a whole, to contribute to the socialization and personal development of their learners (Kentli, 2009; Tough, 2012). This phenomenon has largely been attributed to accountability policies and practices that place premium on test scores and results.

The unrestrained debauchery and sleaziness that have engulfed and permeated all facets of today's societies and communities have renewed concerns about the mandate of educational systems and has also led to critiquing of the role of today's schools in the holistic development of learners. This has evolved varying strands of debate regarding educational remedies. Basically, two main traditions have emerged-introducing subjects or content areas such as religious, moral, character or values education that would equip learners with the requisite values and attitudes and/or exposing learners to the affective elements inherent in the various traditional subjects in the curriculum as they are taught. For instance, getting learners to be patriotic by teaching them history or imbibing some democratic ideals through social studies. Currently, most countries around the globe, including Ghana, have adopted either or both traditions. In spite of these modest curriculum innovations, there have been arguments signalling inadequate propositions principally because of the same reasons for which they were initiated. That is, subjects like Values Education or Religious and Moral Education as in Ghana's case, and other value laden subjects like social studies and history among others are still cognitive focused due to the same accountability and results oriented issues. Coles (1986) intimated earlier that it is a mistake to think of morality as a set of external standards that adults somehow foist upon an unknowing or unwilling child. He regrets further that most of the current moral education efforts fail precisely

because of this mistaken yet pervasive assumption. Halverson (2004) reiterates that the simplistic strategy of directly teaching ethics and morality does not work.

It is on this account that on the heels of the implementation of curriculum innovations in Ghana in 2007, Religious and Moral Education was almost expunged from the curriculum but for the intervention of the Catholic Bishops Conference and other religious bodies. There is therefore the need to pay attention to other ways by which values, attitudes and non-cognitive skills such as decency, honesty, hard work, cooperation, tolerance, among others can be effectively generated for learners to inculcate to complement the ongoing efforts. The hidden curriculum has been considered as an alternative. The paper thus seeks to support the ongoing discourse on exploring the effective use of the hidden curriculum in the generation of affective elements for learners in school to better equip and prepare them for the society.

2. The Concepts Hidden Curriculum and Latent Skills

The use of the term hidden curriculum was first attributed to Phillip Jackson in 1968. He explained it as features that formed part of classroom life which evolved from the social relations and interactions in schools. He observed that these are values, dispositions, social and behavioural expectations like learning to be patient, exercising restraint, trying, completing work, keeping busy, cooperating, showing allegiance to both teachers and peers, being neat and punctual, and conducting oneself courteously. Thereafter, various terminologies such as covert and collateral curriculum have been used by Tanner and Tanner (2007) and others.

Giroux (2001) submits that the hidden curriculum is what is being taught and how one learns in the school. He explains that schools do not only provide instruction but also norms and principles experienced by learners throughout their education life. This underscored, the ace sociologist, Emile Durkheim's observation that more is taught and learned in schools than specified in the established curriculum of textbooks and teacher manuals. Dickerson (2007) substantiates this standpoint when he considered the hidden curriculum to consist of those things learners learn through the experience of attending school rather than the stated educational objectives of such institutions. Those things being referred to are the non-cognitive skills or affective elements that learners catch through the socialization process of schooling (Kentli, (2009). A gleaning of the discourse suggests that the hidden curriculum is a non-academic but educationally significant aspect of schooling which comprises the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes-good or bad - that learners acquire and inculcate because of the way a school is planned and organized. The way a school is structured or organised significantly influences the way of life, interactions and interrelationships between all administrators, teachers and learners in a school community - out of this, the culture of a school evolves from which learners acquire some pattern of values, norms and attitudes unintentionally and unconsciously.

The hidden curriculum is thus experienced in every teaching and learning milieu albeit in varying shades as asserted by Ruff (2013) that it is present in some schools more than others and in some classes more than others relative to how the school is organised. Nonetheless, it is responsible for as much as ninety percent (90%) of all learning taking place in school. It may therefore be posited that learners learn more than they are taught. The implication then is that a huge chunk of what learners consume unintentionally (90%) in any school environment, be they worthy or unworthy, happens on the blind side of the school and not under careful control since schools, policy makers and parents are interested in what learners have been taught and how it manifests in their grades. As a result, Garcia (2014) argues that most of the existing structures in schools are at odds with the development of worthwhile values, attitudes and other non-cognitive skills that can be generated by the hidden curriculum and may contribute to the development of learners and the society. For instance, learners may not be able to acquire and appreciate any democratic ideals just by reading about them since the structures and the culture in schools do not lend themselves to such ideals due to the authoritarian nature of school leadership. The concern is that, the more powerful influence of the school's culture and environment may present learners with skills and attitudes that are at variance with what society values.

3. Levels of the Hidden Curriculum

According to Posner (1987) and Kern (2007) there are two levels to the hidden curriculum. One captures the structure of values within the school and the classroom which entails disciplinary issues, the school's stated goals, the interaction between the school and the community, daily schedule of bells and allocation of contact hours for subjects on the time table. Structure is also reflected in classrooms location and arrangement of desks and explicitly

inherent by the teacher’s disposition and stated classroom rules, guidelines and goals, the classroom atmosphere of interaction, and the teacher’s usual methods of assessment. The second level entails the structure of the explicit or the written curriculum. That is, the specific curriculum separated and mandated for each class, such as the arrangement of subjects like social studies, science and English, the difference in students’ age and cultures in each class, how teachers teach their subjects and lessons; This categorization seems clumsy.

To further elucidate the foregoing proposition, the levels of the hidden curriculum as it evolves from two different environments in the school - the micro (classroom) environment and the macro (outdoor) environment, has been reconceptualised. Though, the school culture that evolves is highly contingent on the entire school structure or the way the school is planned and organised, two slightly different shades of cultures are contrived in two environments due to the differences in the elements of socialization and the kind of interactions that take place. In the classroom environment, interactions basically occur between and among teachers, learners and other instructional resources such as content from textbooks, workbooks, teaching learning materials, teacher’s demeanour and all that teachers do and employ to effect learning as prescribed by the official curriculum and facilitated by the school’s structure and organization. Learners catch or imbibe through observation and imitation, some unwritten skills, values and attitudes from the socialization that occurs. Relatedly, in the macro environment learners may inculcate some other affective elements or similar ones to complement or consolidate what have been acquired in the classroom depending on the varying activities and experiences they engage in with peers, teachers, administrators and other significant elements available during recreational and club activities, excursions, discharge of school chores and designated roles as planned by the school. Figure 1 below is a conceptual model reflecting the interactions in a school environment that generates the hidden curriculum.

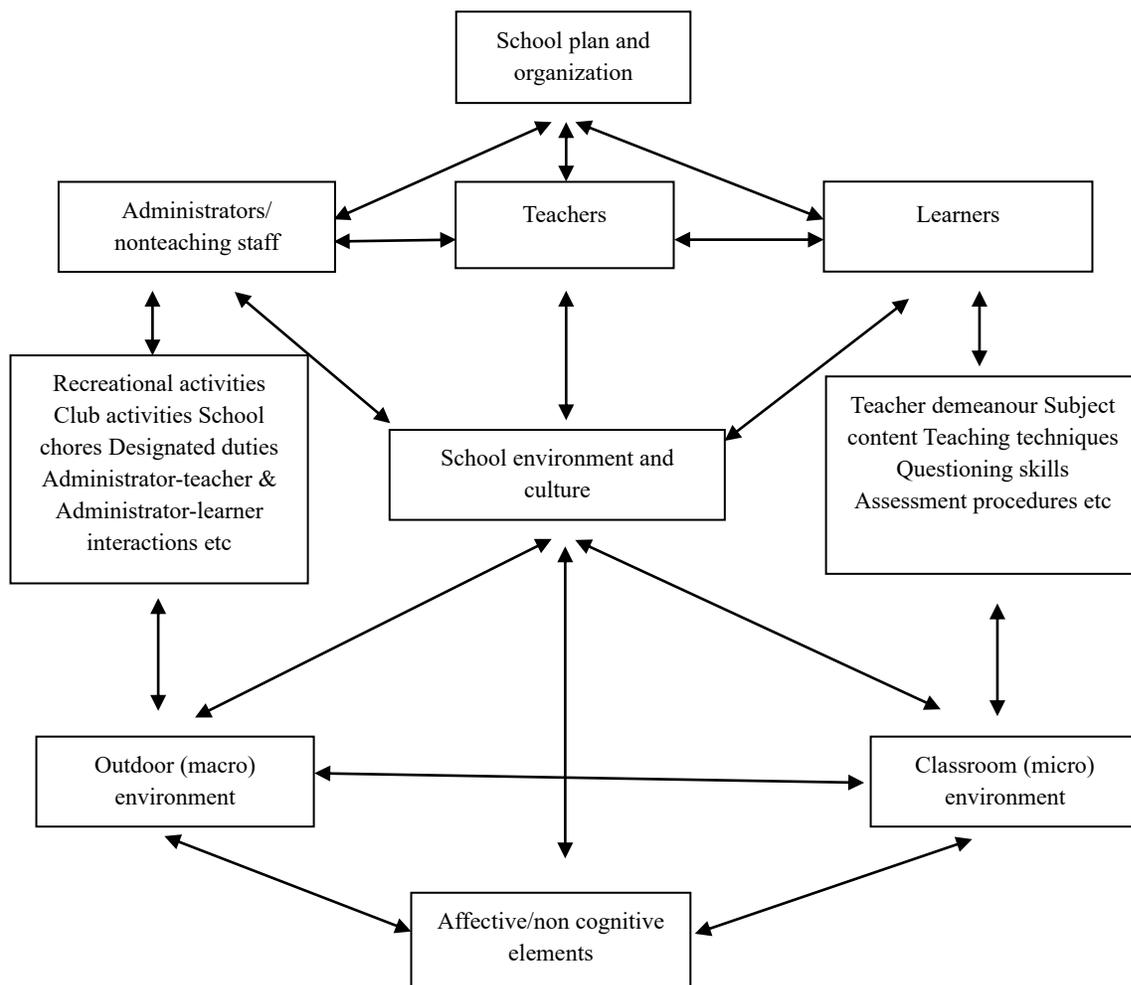


Figure 1. An Interactive Hidden Curriculum Model

The model depicts affective and non-cognitive elements as a function of the interactions and socialization processes that ensue, both within and outside the classroom as a result of the way a school is planned and organised. Thus, the skills, values and attitudes learners catch may either be good or bad, worthwhile or unworthy and may be destructive or constructive to the total development of individual learners and the society.

4. The Need for the Development of Latent Skills

Garcia (2014) intimates that worthwhile skills, values and attitudes matter greatly and they can be nurtured in schools so developing them should be an explicit goal of public education. These elements have been associated with both educational and societal outcomes as evidenced by several meta-analysis by Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger (2011). To underscore this Garcia (2014) admits succinctly that performance in school admits other things than intelligence; to succeed in studies, one must have qualities which depend on attention, will and character. Olson (2012) explains how affective skills relate to academic performance by submitting that children's ability to get along and interact with peers and the absence of aggressive or disruptive behaviour predict and facilitate learning. For instance, according to Duckworth and Martin (2005) and Duckworth, Quinn, and Tsukayama (2012) self-control and self-discipline are predictive of better behaviours in the classroom, which also correlate with improved grades and other measures of academic performance.

More so, with respect to the relationship between affective skills and out of school or societal outcomes, Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006) reports that for new entrants with a four-year degree, opinions from a survey of over 400 employers in the United States suggest that the four most important skills they would look out for are oral communication, teamwork or collaboration, professionalism or work ethic, and critical thinking and problem solving skills. More than 90 percent of employers surveyed declared these skills to be very important. In contrast, writing, mathematics, science, history and geography were ranked lower out of 20 skills. The ranking clearly indicate that the cooperate world does not rely much on basic academic knowledge developed in school settings but rather stress the value of affective skills. The implication is that the formulation of explicit educational policies that deliberately promotes the planning and organization of educational environments that generate worthwhile skills, values and attitudes through the myriad of interactions is critical. Since teaching these affective elements officially as subjects have yielded little, providing a fertile environment for learners to catch them through observation and imitation would make a better impression on them. The explicit prescription of core competencies, which are largely affective inclined, in the 2019 pre-tertiary and teacher education curriculum reforms in Ghana is welcoming.

5. Generating Affective and Non-cognitive Elements through Aspects of School Life

There are various aspects of the life of any learning environment that can be explored to generate affective or non-cognitive skills for learners to inculcate. Some of these are the leadership styles of school heads, teachers' demeanour and appearance, teaching techniques employed, assessment practices, interaction with peers, kind of roles assigned to learners, school system, co-curricular activities amongst others.

The kind of leadership adopted educational institutions affects its climate and influences all other activities that go on in it. In a school where an authoritarian leadership style is largely employed, more often administrators or heads take decisions unilaterally without input or recourse to the concerns of teachers and learners. Teachers and other players in the school are merely informed of decisions taken; as a result, they remain passive participants. Since learners spend several years in school, those who study in such an environment may likely feel intimidated and become timid. Such learners and even teachers find it difficult voicing their concerns on issues or contribute to decision making. Teachers who are outspoken and seen as a threat are sometimes victimised. In Ghana, in some cases such teachers, based on reports from the headmaster or principal of the school, may be granted an open release or transferred on the grounds of being uncooperative.

However, usually because such leaders come along as strict people, learners under their watch learn to adhere strictly to rules and regulations. Over the years, they become disciplined but this may be borne largely out of fear. The chances are that learners who go through such a system may become timid, passive or adopt that style of leadership unless they become conscious of its negative effects and unlearn such attitudes later in life. Garcia (2014) underscores this by indicating that some schools in American, and perhaps other parts of the world including Ghana may not be able to develop democratic ideals and values in learners because the school structures do not permit that. Contrarily, under a democratic administration where teachers and learners represented by their leaders, are active players and partners in school development, learners get the opportunity to contribute to decision making without fear of being victimised.

Learners may leave such an institution with skills and values such as contribution to decision, open mindedness, tolerance, cooperation, negotiation skills among others. A laissez faire administrative environment will also obviously turn out learners; most of whom may be carefree.

School disciplinary policies could also be considered as an aspect of school life that contributes both directly and indirectly to the hidden curriculum and the development of affective elements. All educational institutions across various levels provide some code of discipline or rules and regulations for learners to manage and regulate behaviour. Since ignorance of the law is no excuse, learners are expected to familiarise themselves with regulations and the penalties or sanctions that go with various degrees of infractions. These directly influence learners' behaviour and conduct in and out of school. To a large extent, learners may want to abide by such rules so as to become disciplined people. This may range from being time conscious, meeting deadlines, seeking permission, taking responsibilities and so on which are enduring skills and attitudes learners may require to enable them succeed academically and also survive in the world of work. It has however been noticed that sometimes existing disciplinary measures used to address learners' misbehaviour are at odds with nurturing affective skills, values and attitudes. Noguero (2011) indicates that some of them are too harsh considering the degree of misbehaviour and sees them as zero-tolerance policies. Some of these may be outright expulsion, suspension, canning and even weeding in the case of some Ghanaian basic and high schools. When such measures are used repeatedly, they become counterproductive and in some cases lead to other undesirable consequences such as drop out and uncooperative attitudes of learners. Boccanfuso (2011) argues that the use of disciplinary measures needs to be premised on their ability to support and promote safe learning environments that would generate affective and non-cognitive elements for learners and prevent misbehaviour rather than sanctioning wrong doing. A supportive school disciplinary initiative that is bolstered by a strong guidance and counselling department in schools at various levels will not be out of place.

According to Albert Bandura's social learning theory, modelling and imitation play a significant role in learning and behaviour formation. It is for this reason that a teacher's appearance, disposition or demeanour in and out of class is considered crucial in contributing to the hidden curriculum. What teachers do as they interact with learners create lasting impressions on them. More often learners mimic or imitate the way their favourite or unfavoured teachers dress, how they speak, gesticulate, or react to issues in class among others. For instance, a teacher who intimidates learners will grow learners who are timid, passive and uncreative. Once learners realise a teacher does not tolerate questions in class and reacts awfully, they may decide not to contribute during such lessons. With time it affects learners negatively while some even develop a phobia for the subject unconsciously for the rest of their lives. On the other hand, a teacher who adopts a more receptive and democratic approach leaves learners with a lot of positive values and attitudes that live with them. The question that begs for answers then is, why would teachers want to intimidate students?

More so, the interactive technique and strategies employed in class engender in learners some affective elements. Teachers who use techniques that require learners to work in groups, helps them to be cooperative and tolerant of others opinion. They also unconsciously acquire the skills of working as team mates and pulling resources for the collective good of a group in order to achieve set goals above ones' individual interest. In a similar fashion, using discussions, role plays and other learner centred interactive strategies would possibly generate more worthwhile skills, values and attitude for learners than teacher dominated techniques like lectures.

Interestingly, learners develop some values from the kind of seats they are provided and the sitting arrangement used for lessons. Though, there might not be enough empirical evidence to this effect, a critical look at the situation where dual desks are provided for learners in our schools in Ghana to sit in twos, threes, and in some worst scenarios at the lower primary schools where four pupils squeeze themselves unto a desk, does not augur well for learning. Especially, when they are supposed to work individually and independently on tasks, tests and projects, learners are tempted to seek help from colleagues or 'cheat' in spite of a stern instruction from the teacher not to 'copy'. The idea of getting learners to think critically and solve problems independently is defeated. Learners undoubtedly develop the habit of seeking unnecessary assistance after learning in this kind of condition throughout school. Providing enough seats and varying arrangements that would facilitate easy movement and management of learning space have values in themselves.

The above notwithstanding, the kind of assessment practices employed in school with its attendant social conditions generate some values for learners. Ametewee (2007) intimate that it is not the content of the tests or its format which is important but rather the rigorous controlled conditions under which such tests are written. He explains that the physical separation of learners from one another and the invigilators' patrol of examination rooms are meant to ensure that examination papers represent independent work. In recent times where there is increasing emphasis on individual achievement, higher institutions and cooperate bodies are interested in how well each person can perform on their own;

pre-tertiary institutions can therefore not afford but put in strategies to provide that since it is a very important value. There should also be group projects and assignments to engender in learners the skills and values of working with others for a collective good.

By and large, performance measuring activities such as tests, sporting competitions and the like have implications for both those who are successful and failures, winners and losers. Ametewee (2007) argues that success or failure teach learners to cope with the consequent psychological repercussions: a brilliant learner will need to manage success in the context of peer equality in non-academic areas whereas a poor and a slow learner not only must continue to take part in achievement activities leading to his failure, but must also learn to live with the experience of failure, accept it as part of life and rather learn from it. Learners will then gradually be developing what has become known as adversity quotient; developing resilience in rough times.

Learners acquire a lot of skills, values and attitudes from their interaction with their peers both in and out of the classroom. Most of what they do is to make them feel belonged and also to enable them identify with groups. Learners may therefore dress in a particular way, use certain slangs and the like. This may be tied in with the kind of culture learners adopt as a result of the school system; whether it is co-educational or a single sex school. Some students in mixed schools may want to relate more gently and decently with their peers, especially, at public places because of the presence of colleagues of the opposite sex. Their counterparts, most especially from boys' schools, who would have adopted a carefree attitude would not mind. The culture that exists in these two separate environments to a very large extent shapes the perception, attitudes and dispositions of learners. It is therefore important that opportunities are created for learners to socialize and interact with themselves in a healthy way in order to develop interpersonal relationship skills.

Moreover, the student governance systems or the way various offices are assigned to learners, by appointment or electoral processes, play a significant role in preparing them to take up responsibilities and serves as a platform for developing leadership skills, values and attitudes. Besides, duties learners are assigned during cleaning and other activities unintentionally define gender roles which learners grow up with. Even right from very early ages in school, girls are assigned less physical duties as sweeping and cleaning while the boys are given heavier duties coupled with what they pick from passages in textbooks that unconsciously over project male power and dominance. Though, they would not have been taught in class, learners; both males and females grow up to know what duties are traditionally meant for them. Structures and processes for selecting student leaders should be well laid out for learners to acquire the requisite ideals. Also, elements that signal gender stereotyping should be eliminated to afford all learners, both males and females, equal development opportunities.

A gleaning of the foregoing suggests that these and other aspects of school life play a significant role in the affective development of learners. The knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are generated by these various aspects are not taught; they are caught. It has been recognised that what learners pick from the hidden curriculum is much more and stays with them much longer than what they learn in class. It is therefore important that educational policy makers and school authorities take note and make deliberate attempts at exploring all the various aspects of school life that engender values to enhance the total development of learners. At this point, it is instructive to note that though learners may inculcate both positive and negative values, creating structures and an environment that promotes positive aspects of the hidden curriculum is inevitable.

6. Educational Policy Implications

In order to generate affective and non-cognitive elements for Ghanaian learners to catch as they find themselves in diverse learning environments, there is the need for a shift in educational policy formulation and implementation. Firstly, there is the need for a review of accountability practices and policies so as to keep it broadened to make clear expectations regarding what schools and teachers should do to develop positive affective skills for learners. This may involve how enabling environments can be created to promote and support the development of worthwhile skills, values and attitudes. Since these can only be scored qualitatively using various forms of observation and record with rating scales check lists, anecdotal reports among others across various pre-tertiary levels of the educational system. There is therefore the need to rethink and redesign assessment and accountability systems to include both quantitative and qualitative procedures that inform performance, teaching and learning (Garcia, 2014).

Directives for supervision and monitoring of teachers should be refocused and expanded. Currently in Ghana, the practice where school supervisors and other education officials go to schools only to count number of exercises done by learners and lesson notes written by teachers to measure performance should be deemphasized. This obliges

teachers to focus on cognitive attainments to the detriment of the acquisition of non-cognitive skills by learners. There is the need for a more comprehensive periodic supervision and monitoring to cover how schools are being administered, the culture of the school and records on learners' affective development.

In the long term, there is also the need to fully integrate into the curriculum for teacher preparation and training ways by which the hidden curriculum can be explored in various educational environments to develop affective, non-cognitive skills of learners, other social imperatives and how these can be monitored, assessed and reported using informal assessment procedures. Considerable efforts have been made to promote the use of interactive pedagogies and assessment practices that would develop core competencies, which are soft skills, proposed in a new 4-year Bachelor of Education curriculum developed in Ghana for Initial Teacher Education Institutions. It is expected that teacher educators would use and model these to enable trainers imbibe the requisite skills, values and attitudes.

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