

Is the Hidden Curriculum a Relevant Issue in Educational Processes?

¿Es el currículo oculto un aspecto importante en los procesos educativos?

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This paper explores some ideas about the hidden curriculum as an amount of ideas and beliefs which are implicit in an indirect way into the scholar life. Those ideas are regarding to gender equality, social status and racial difference, among others.

We consider teachers are able to integrate the hidden curriculum as a pedagogical strategy in the classroom. Examples of integration include activities such as observation techniques, role-plays, peer modeling and particularly, the portfolio as a useful tool for reflection which reveals the hidden curriculum.

Key words: Hidden Curriculum, Pedagogical Strategy, Portfolio, ELT Processes, Stereotypes

Este documento explora algunas ideas acerca del currículo oculto como una suma de ideas y creencias que están implícitos de una forma indirecta dentro de la vida escolar. Estas ideas están relacionadas con la equidad de género, diferencias sociales y raciales, entre otros.

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Consideramos que es posible para los docentes integrar el currículo como estrategia pedagógica en el aula. Ejemplos de esta integración incluyen técnicas de observación, juegos de roles, modelamiento en parejas y particularmente, el portafolio como herramienta de reflexión que permita hacer evidente el currículo oculto.

Palabras claves: Currículo Oculto, Estrategia Pedagógica, Estereotipos, Enseñanza de Inglés, Portafolio

Many ideas spring up when we, as teachers, talk about curriculum. We think of syllabuses, plans of study, approaches, methodology, evaluation, resources and others. But have you

heard about the **hidden curriculum**? Maybe you have, maybe not. We want to reflect on some key ideas concerning this issue.

The hidden curriculum refers to all the actions or situations developed in class unconsciously, not prepared by the teacher; they are the product of myths or assumptions people have concerning teaching-learning processes. It involves all the teachings which are presented to students but are not consciously received by them, students never see it so they are not aware of it. Haralambos (1991) defines it as consisting of "...those things pupils learn through the experience of attending school rather than the stated educational objectives of such institutions."

It can be said that some aspects related to the "hidden curriculum" are constructive and positive, but others can be destructive and negative; that is, some of them help students to learn good and fruitful things unconsciously but in other cases, they learn things or assume wrong attitudes because of stereotyped thinking of teachers or situations concerning school processes.

Here we have some patterns regarding the English Language Teaching (ELT) hidden curriculum:

- Learning a new language gives cachet and style.
- English is a very strange language; it is very difficult to learn it.
- State school students have more problems learning a new language; it is easier for private school students.
- Teachers cannot ask for textbooks to state school students; they are too poor to buy them.

Taking into account that education is a socialization process, there are some specific social aspects highly affected by the hidden curriculum such as gender equality, social classes, racial differences and so on.

Concerning gender equality, the hidden curriculum generally transmits a lot of ideas, concepts and attitudes that carry out many implications on the treatment given to pupils considering their gender differences. We mention some examples below.

- Boys are more intelligent than girls.
- Girls are supposed to be more tender and cuter than boys.
- Girls deserve better treatment than boys.
- Some sports like soccer are appropriate only for boys while some activities like cooking are more appropriate for girls.
- Some subjects like math are special for boys; girls must prefer languages and artistic areas.
- Teachers are more confident with girls than with boys.
- Girls must behave better than boys.

Considering the powerful influence the hidden curriculum has on students' learning, the control teachers must exert in their classrooms situations is very important. Since teachers cannot ignore the importance of the hidden curriculum, they must make the best use of it for the benefit of the students.

Firstly, they must look for strategies to improve this hidden curriculum by addressing it in a constructive and meaningful way. After detecting cases or situations in which the hidden curriculum is causing a negative influence on students, teachers must change their attitudes or assumptions when trying to better the teaching processes according to each case. They must be more demanding but, at the same time, have more motivated classes; they must also be tolerant and confident with students so that they can be closer to the English teacher, participating dynamically and actively.

Moreover, they must make the hidden curriculum explicit to students; they may use some observation techniques such as diaries and video recording, among others. Thus, teachers collect experiences from their classroom practice and may note what happens there in an unconscious and unprepared way. Consequently they can improve or correct situations they consider negative or inappropriate in the teaching-learning process. Other strategies such as role playing, peer modelling and teacher modelling, are all good tools for teaching some social skills that change stereotyped or ambiguous views about social actions or habits.

Taking into account our own experience, we want to remark here on another tool we can use in order to address the hidden curriculum: the portfolio. The portfolio can be used as an evaluation tool in which students participate directly in the processes developed in class. Students collect all the materials (guides, support material, quizzes, essays, etc.) used and produced in class, organize them coherently and meaningfully, and, observing their processes and results, make their own reflection about their strengths and weaknesses in order to seek improvement and commitment plans. Besides, they make comments about the class development and give suggestions or recommendations whenever necessary. Here, we have a great opportunity to watch "inside" our classroom practice and conduct the "hidden curriculum" in a useful and correct way.

In general terms, we consider the hidden curriculum an issue of great relevance when talking about teaching-learning processes.

A good management of this issue can lead us to better the quality of educational and cultural processes in our schools.

REFERENCES

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