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**CONVERSATIONS ON HIDDEN CURRICULUM (RE)SOURCES
AND STRUCTURE**

Emanuel Soare (a)*
*Corresponding Author

(a) University of Pitești, Romania, Pitești, emisoare@yahoo.com

Abstract

The present paper starts an investigative process of the characteristics of an educational reality which is hidden from the sight of the uninformed participant, but has a decisive role in the school curriculum. This educational reality is represented by one of the least studied concepts of today school theory and practice, and that is the term hidden curriculum. By its multifaceted characteristics and ways of relating to other types of curricula, the hidden curriculum has a determined role in the architecture of the factors that determines the attaining of educational outcomes. Sometimes hidden in the plain sight, other times without allowing to be discovered, but never with the aim to remain undiscovered, the hidden curriculum is a main element of the school curriculum that cannot be ignored. We aim to identify the main characteristics of the hidden curriculum, its roles and consequences, and also the way it integrates in the architecture of what the educational theory and practice defines as the formal curriculum. Determining the curricular architecture of education, the educational aims expressed through the concept of the key-competences for lifelong learning, the hidden curriculum generates a big interest, not only for the school, but for the entire society. In this context, it must be emphasized the role of the hidden curriculum in the process of attaining the objectives, facilitating it or, on the contrary, delaying the expected results or even determining new ones, unexpected and certainly not anticipated.

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1. Introduction

1.1. The hidden curriculum forerunners and sources

One of the newest educational theories, with a fundamental role in a better understanding of what education represents today, is the curriculum theory, by its hypostasis as the curricular approach of education (Soare, 2013). As a theory of education and instruction projection, it stresses the defining role of educational outcomes before undertaking a concrete action in the classroom or outside it.

It is very clear that the roles played by school in our present-day society should not be reduced to transmitting the formal curriculum, understood as educational contents, but they include a more extended area, such as individuals socializing, the reproduction of social structures or even social innovation.

The term hidden curriculum, sometimes called unstudied curriculum was first introduced by Phillip Jackson (Jackson, 1968) and it became a key concept recognized by the scientific community of curriculum studies. Thus, in O'Donnell perspective (2014, pp. 10-11), the concept of hidden curriculum first surfaced in the 1960s in the field of sociology of education, one of the new (pedagogical) science of education, and with primary focus on elementary education. Thus, the hidden curriculum has several conceptual forerunners like the following ones:

- i. the *collateral learning* (John Dewey's concept of learning that takes place outside the classroom),
- ii. the *unintended consequences of learning* (Robert Merton's theory and his delineation between the concepts of manifest and latent functions),
- iii. the sociological distinction between *formal* and *informal* norms and values,
- iv. the broader educational distinctions between *explicit* vs *implicit* and *deep* vs *superficial* learning.

These concepts precede the birth and development of the hidden curriculum concept. In general, the specialty literature presents the hidden curriculum as a concept rooted in the theories of the functional type, considered as traditional, developed in the 1960s, and analysed, with multiple development of its sources and significance, through consensus theory, by specialists such as Durkheim E., Parsons T., Jackson Ph., Dreeben R.; correspondence theories promoted by Bowles S., Gintis H.; the structuralist cultural reproduction theories of Bourdieu P. and Bernstein B.

The early definitions of the hidden curriculum were focused on how schools are designed to reproduce societal values, obedience to authority and existing class structures, and less on the innovation of the society. The hidden curriculum is defined as a set of rules or different guidelines that are not directly taught, but that are assumed to be known by the participants in the educational settings.

As Margolis et al. (2001, pp. 5-6) pinpoint, authors such as Durkheim, Parsons, Jackson, and Dreeben, reunited under the heading of consensus theory, provide the foundation for the general definition of the hidden curriculum as the elements of socialization that take place in school, but are not part of the formal curricular content.

The consensus theory was influenced, beginning with the 1960s, by the sociological theories which, influenced by the Marxist thinking, have criticised the way schools tend to legitimate the reproduction of inequality, including social class, racial, and gender relations (Margolis et al., 2001, p. 7).

The socialization process in schools was analysed in terms of its reproduction of stratified relationships, outcomes, and ideological belief structures.

Thus, the early origins of defining the hidden curriculum are linked to the social paradigm of education which stresses out the relation between school and society, expressed through the reproductive character by the school culture of society structures and mentality. This relation takes the form of the hidden curriculum. It is to be further observed whether this perspective is the most efficient in defining the hidden curriculum.

2. Problem Statement

For Myles et al. (2004), the hidden curriculum concept is complex and elusive (p. 14) being represented by all unstated rules or customs which are present, implicitly or explicitly, within the school organization. It also contains a series of items that impact social interactions, school performance, and sometimes safety. The hidden curriculum includes idioms, metaphors, and slang, things most people “just pick up” or learn through observation or subtle cues, including body language (p. 1).

Most often, knowing and understanding the hidden curriculum cannot be directly achieved, but when a hidden curriculum error occurs. Therefore, the impact on the development of child’s personality is huge; any failure to follow the hidden curriculum can cause a child to be shunned by peers, be viewed as gullible, or considered a troublemaker (Myles et al., 2004, p. 13). Also, within the school, the teachers’ expectations represent elements of the hidden curriculum. While teachers develop and teach certain explicit classroom rules, they do not usually teach the different expectations they have for their students.

There are several hidden curriculum items that are not understood in the school setting or that teachers do not address in their classrooms (Bieber, 1994). They might include, for example, asking questions like: what students should be doing when the bell rings, how to travel from class to class in the most direct way. Also, the physical plan of the building, the administrative structure of the school, or the daily schedule reflects different aspects of the school context, parts of the hidden curriculum.

Within the same context, among the things learnt in the first couple of days of schooling by the new students, Myles et al. (2004, p. 19), pinpoint the following elements that produce various aspects of the hidden curriculum: the way teachers tolerate lateness or tardiness, their perspective on homework, or the value teachers offer to final exams.

Thus, hidden curriculum makes its way in the reality of school even from the first contacts of the students with the school institution, beginning with the way in which the school is organized and finishing with teachers’ or the management staff’s attitude towards various aspects of the educational process.

3. Research Questions

We can ask ourselves whether the hidden curriculum is a part of the formal curriculum which has not yet been discovered by students, for example, or whether does it represent a set of elements which are hidden intentionally by the curriculum conceptors? And being so, as Martin (1994, p. 162) states, the hidden curriculum can be found yet remains hidden, because finding is different than telling. Also, it is

possible that certain curricular dimensions might be hidden, imperceptible for somebody but, at the same time, obvious for another participant. Can be hidden curriculum compared to the mechanisms that function behind the curtain and put on stage a representation for the participants? There are some of the questions we can start from in searching the meaning and significance of the hidden curriculum.

The research questions that are followed in this study are the following ones: what is hidden curriculum? Which context facilitates the revealing of the hidden aspects of the schooling? What is the role of the hidden curriculum in the global architecture of the school?

4. Purpose of the Study

This study aims at revealing the theoretical and practical value of the hidden curriculum concept and the impact it has on the reality of present-day education. The identification of the hidden elements of the formal curriculum represents a starting point in projecting education and in explaining the causes that can influence the process of achieving the objectives regarding students' skill development.

5. Research Methods

The research methods used for achieving the objectives are of a qualitative type, hermeneutic and interpretative, underlining a synchronic and diachronic approach of the phenomenon known as the concept of hidden curriculum. The analysis is specific to educational sciences which capitalize the historical research as a fundamental type of research regarding the identification and stabilization of the key concepts of educational sciences and, subsequently, of the curriculum theory as the general theory of education and instruction design.

6. Findings

Henry Giroux (1983, pp. 48–60, as cited in Margolis et al., 2001, p. 14) defines four approaches of the concept of hidden curriculum: traditional, liberal, radical, and dialectical critique.

- i. the *traditional approach* that accepts uncritically the existing relationship between schools and the society (Jackson; Dreeben),
- ii. the *liberal approach* that locates the hidden curriculum in specific social practices, cultural images, or forms of discourse that reinforced discrimination and prejudice but could potentially be uncovered and eliminated (Anyon; Martin),
- iii. the *radical approach* that focuses on the political economy of schooling and regards the social relations of the production process as the determining force in shaping the school environment (Bowles; Gintis),
- iv. the *dialectical critique/resistance theory* that postulates that hidden curriculum is plural and that contradictions open spaces for students and teachers to resist mechanisms of social control and domination and to create alternative cultural forms (Apple; Giroux; Hooks; Macedo; McLaren; Freire).

These approaches emphasize the importance of understanding the context created by the relation between education / school and society. The clearer, simple and more direct the relation is, the smaller the

role of the hidden curriculum. Instead, nowadays, due to the complexity of the relations between school and society, there is an increasing place for the hidden curriculum. It can be revealed by identifying / clarifying the social functions of the school as it is organized, from preschool to the academic level, with a great opening towards life-long education. Besides, the educational system obtains the reproduction of the basic structure of society culture with the help of the hidden curriculum, a fundamental issue of sociology. Therefore, as Margolis et al. (2001, p. 4) show, the concept of hidden curriculum offers a valuable theoretical framework from which to examine the social functions of education.

After highlighting the initial meanings and early definitions of hidden curriculum, we can emphasize, as Myles et al. (2004, p. 13) do, the existence of some hidden curriculum items reflected on the language level by statements such as: I didn't tell you that, but; it should be obvious that; everyone knows that; common sense tells us. Identifying these elements of speech becomes essential for every student because not understanding the hidden curriculum can cause a student to be bullied, ignored, made fun of, or to be misunderstood. Its impact can be felt in the school, community, home, on the job, or in the judicial system.

Taking into account the ideas of Snyder (1971), who said that the most successful students are not those who are the brightest, but those who learn what the system really wants of them, Joseph F. O'Donnell pinpoints that students spend a lot of time trying to figure out the expected versus the stated in their teacher's discourse. They often get angry when there is a large gap or when they find it difficult to untangle this difference. These actions of the students underline what sociologists call the image management, the putting on of masks (for example, other-than-authentic expressions or appearances) as they adapt to what they think their teachers expect. Thus, they become situational chameleons, and often practice what is called "faking it until you make it", and such social posturing may be seen merely as situational coping mechanisms (O'Donnell, 2014, p. 10).

7. Conclusions

The concept of hidden curriculum has gone a long and complex way in the process of its definition as an important element of educational reality. From early definitions that were focused on how schools are functioning and how that contributes to the reproduction of societal values and structures, from identifying the set of rules that are not directly taught, but that are assumed by the school actors and participants to be known, to the considered as a unstudied curriculum, the concept of hidden curriculum represents nowadays an important element of the curricular architecture with a major impact both on curricular projection and on the implementation of its educational goals.

Hidden curriculum must be also understood in the context of its forerunners who emphasized the collateral learning that takes place outside the school, the learning that can be formal but also informal, with unintended, but real consequences including the manifest and latent functions of learning and integrating the distinctions between explicit, implicit, deep or superficial learning. From teachers' expectations to image management, hidden curriculum represents a relevant dimension of the formal curriculum that must be taken into consideration when designing the educational context and actions that are to be efficient and successful in attaining of the educational objectives, expressed, in the postmodern context, by the key-competences that every student should manifest by the end of compulsory education.

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