



The Hidden Curriculum

In school, we learn the norms and values and culture of a society through both the hidden curriculum and the formal curriculum. The formal curriculum is learning subjects such as English and History and the hidden curriculum is a set of values, attitudes and principles transmitted to pupils in school but not as a part of the formal curriculum of timetabled subjects.

This Factsheet will look at what we learn through the hidden curriculum and how important the hidden curriculum is in teaching us the norms and values of society.

It is important to distinguish between the hidden curriculum and the formal curriculum.

The Formal Curriculum	The Hidden Curriculum
Subjects taught in school, for example:	Queuing
Mathematics	Wearing school uniform
English	Competitive sports
Sciences	Respect to teachers
History	Time keeping
Geography	Rewards (e.g. merit badges)
	Detentions and exclusions

Jackson (1968) 'Life in Classrooms'

Jackson used the term hidden curriculum to describe the unofficial 3Rs - rules, routines and regulations. These 3Rs have to be learned by students to survive comfortably in classrooms.

Perspectives on the Hidden Curriculum

1. Functionalists, such as Durkheim and Parsons, focus on the links between education and other social institutions such as the family and the workplace.

The hidden curriculum plays a key role:

- In preparing young people for adulthood, citizenship and working life, providing them with the means for improving their lives and life changes through upwards mobility e.g. working hard, respecting authority, dress code.
- In providing a sense of belonging and commitment to a bigger society (e.g. assemblies).
- In creating a shared belief in the importance of cooperation (e.g. school rules, respecting authority, punctuality).
- In creating a shared belief that individual achievement should be based on merit (e.g. hard work, graded by ability).
- In creating a belief in individual competition through which individuals learn to make the maximum possible contribution to society (e.g. team sports, competition).

Activity: During school lessons you are clearly learning the specific information needed to pass exams in those subjects.

In the hidden curriculum you are learning many skills needed for life after education.

Copy out a table similar to the one below and think about what skills are being taught through these features of the hidden curriculum.

Features of the hidden curriculum	What life skills are being taught?
School rules, rewards and detentions	
School assemblies	
Competitive sports	
Respecting authority	
Punctuality	
Working hard	
Graded by ability	
School hierarchy	
Streaming and setting	

Evaluation

Reynolds (1984) claims that the hidden curriculum does not teach the skills needed by employers. In recent years, employers have criticised the lack of employability skills possessed by school leavers and graduates. A report published by the British Chamber of Commerce (BCC), based on a survey of over 3,500 business and education leaders, stated that two-thirds of businesses (69%) believe that secondary schools are not effective at preparing young people for work.

Activity: Look at this report and summarise what it says about students not having adequate skills needed by employers.

<https://academytoday.co.uk/Article/secondary-school-pupils-not-ready-for-work>

See if you can find other articles which might support or contradict these statements:

- Schools clearly have a hidden curriculum but how consistent this is or how far it is accepted by pupils is more open to debate.
- Not all schools and people within education share the same values so there may not be a consistent set of values to pass on.

Exam Hint: It is important to practice evaluating theories and studies as this is an essential skill for essay writing.

2. Marxists such as Bowles and Gintis, argue that the hidden curriculum is just an instrument or tool to prepare children for the workplace. Schools prepare children to fit easily into their future roles, creating hardworking, docile, obedient and a highly-motivated workforce. They see schools as little societies which mirror the workplace. They call this the **correspondence principle**.

According to Bowles and Gintis, the hidden curriculum in particular prepares children for their future role in capitalist society.

Activity:

Draw a table with some other features of the hidden curriculum and then complete it to show the correspondence between school and work. Example:

School	Work
Competition among pupils	Competition for promotion
School uniforms	Dress code required in work
Hierarchy of authority (head teacher, staff, pupils)	Hierarchy of authority (boss, supervisors, workers)

Exam Hint: Make sure you know how each of these features of the hidden curriculum are relevant to the workplace.

Evaluation

- Bowles and Gintis have been criticised because there is less correspondence between schools and the needs of the economy than they suggest.
- It has been suggested that the work of Bowles and Gintis focusses too much on social class and neglects the issues of gender and ethnicity, which are also important factors in educational achievement.
- Many pupils may not accept the values promoted by the school and some pupils may form anti school subcultures with values that are very different from the values of the school. Willis believed that education is not a particularly successful agency of socialisation. In his research he found the existence of a counter culture that was opposed to the values of school. Members of the counter culture did not follow school rules and were not obedient. Their main aim was to avoid lessons and they resented the school's attempts to control their time.



3. Feminists such as Michelle Stanworth, believe the hidden curriculum promotes patriarchal values that ensure the dominance of men in society.

Feminists believe that:

- Boys and girls are treated differently in schools.
- Teachers devote more time to boys.
- Boys and girls accept different roles in school with boys learning to be masculine and girls learning to be feminine.
- Senior positions in education are disproportionately held by men. This reinforces the message that males are and should be dominant.
- Subject choice may reflect a hidden curriculum that portrays some subjects as being more masculine and others more feminine.

All these are reflected through the hidden curriculum.

Evaluation

- These ideas are a little outdated as boys and girls now study the same subjects in schools as part of the National Curriculum.
- More women are now holding senior positions in schools.
- According to the Education Authorities Directory the percentage of secondary school head teachers was 25%. By 2015-16 this had risen to 38%.



Exam Hint: Comparing and contrasting the views of different perspectives on the hidden curriculum is an excellent way to demonstrate the analytical and evaluative skills necessary in the exam. Try it out!

Re-read what the functionalists, Marxist and feminist say about the hidden curriculum.

Can you find some similarities and differences between the different perspectives?

Activity: Practice answering these questions

- Define the term hidden curriculum?
- Outline three features of the hidden curriculum?

Information in this Factsheet can also be incorporated into essay questions which ask about the influence of in-school factors on educational achievement. The hidden curriculum can be discussed as an in-school factor that influences the skills/abilities of pupils.

For example: Evaluate the view that in-school factors are the main cause of differences in the educational achievement of different social groups.

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