

The Formal, Informal and Hidden Curriculum

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The curriculum has been defined throughout the course in many different ways and its concept and function may slightly differ for different people. However one of the definitions that I found most fitting is that the curriculum is a plan of action for learning and therefore we, as educators, have the task of interpreting and implementing the curriculum that is handed to us. This is not a simple task because, as we saw in the course, there are a certain number of curriculum aspects (formal, informal and hidden) that need to be taken into account when both planning and teaching.

UNESCO defines the formal curriculum as “the planned programme of objectives, content, learning experiences, resources and assessment offered by a school.” This dimension of the formal curriculum is the most straightforward and easiest to take into account. In the course we saw that the formal curriculum encompasses a wide variety of potential educational and instructional practices, which we are able to implement in our classroom. To take the formal curriculum into account teachers will usually plan lessons encompassing as much of the formal curriculum as possible. In my experience this includes planning my own lessons and selecting teaching strategies and materials as well as activities that will help my students achieve the necessary learning experiences that are expected.

One of the other dimensions of the curriculum is the informal curriculum. This aspect goes beyond the formal aspect and is usually found in the way of co-curricular activities. These activities happen outside of an academic environment but can still help in developing soft-skills and enhancing the content of the formal curriculum. One way this aspect is taken into account is, for example, through clubs. If the school offers clubs that include sports, arts and science outside of an academic context, teachers can encourage students to join these clubs. For teachers it is also a chance to get to know our students outside of the classroom. I coached volleyball for one year and it was very interesting to see how the students behaved in this environment as opposed to in my Science class. Another way I try to take the informal curriculum into account is by giving students tasks that include things outside of the school, like for example interviewing three adults on the topic that I am teaching at the moment.

The last aspect of the curriculum is the hidden curriculum, which refers to the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students learn in school. As mentioned in the course the hidden curriculum is a by-product of the education system. It is based on the recognition that students pick up lessons in school that are not officially a formal course of study. Lavoie (cited in Bieber, 1994) described the “hidden curriculum” as important social skills that everyone knows, but no one is taught. Most of us already incorporate the hidden curriculum without really planning for it. For example, when I tell my students that I expect them to raise their hands when they want to speak I am teaching them that it is not acceptable to interrupt someone who is talking or by telling them that their grade will be affected because of late submission of their work I am teaching them the importance of deadlines and how missing them has a negative effect. Having said this, I believe that taking the hidden curriculum into account means trying to be the best role model for our students and letting them know that we expect them to behave accordingly.

All in all it is important to know the difference between these aspects of the curriculum and how we can take them into account in our planning and teaching to provide our students with the best learning experience possible.