The Hidden Curriculum: necessary evil?

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Abstract

The Hidden Curriculum is an issue that effects the field of education. It refers to the transmission of educational content and ethics that are not formally communicated, established or conveyed within the learning environment.

By studying the awareness of hidden curricular issues in 30 high school teachers in the Delhi- NCR region the research studies the existence of the concept in the Indian context and attempts to evaluate the awareness of the same.

Through my study I concluded that although hidden curriculum is necessary to provide positive impact, it is possible to keep its negative consequences to a minimum by creating awareness among policy makers, teachers, parent and student community.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Although the concept of The Hidden Curriculum first came into use by Philip Jackson in 1968, it has drawn the attention of sociologists in the past few decades. The CBSE sociology syllabus has mentioned it in the 11th grade without giving a proper explanation of the same.

The hidden curriculum refers *to values, morals and attitudes which may not be explicitly taught to students but are indirectly learnt through the experience* of attending school rather than the stated educational objectives of the institution.

It refers to the informal curricula as opposed to the official curriculum. The hidden curriculum is all those things that taught in schools that aren't written down in syllabus documents The *visible curriculum* is what teachers are told to teach: mathematics, science, languages, and so forth. But there is a lot more that goes on at school besides. How to walk, talk, dress, socialize etc

The hidden curriculum may also act positively providing checks by balancing views and providing room for open discussions of officially stated text or opinions. For example a teacher may chose to debate the drawbacks of Gandhism despite the fact that text books depict only the positive aspects. It inculcates manners such as being courteous, teaches the value of making an effort and keeping busy, reinforces norms like waiting quietly for your turn and turning up on time.

The hidden curriculum includes intentional agendas and unintentional messaging transmitted through books, teachers, teaching methodology and education structures

For example, reading and mathematics are the most important elementary school subjects. This is clearly communicated by scheduling more time for these subjects than for others, such as science and social studies, scheduling them in morning prime time rather than in the afternoon, and testing them more often than other subjects or skills. Further examples are discussed through the project.

Two types or 'related aspects' of the hidden curriculum are identifiable: *the structural or organizational and the cultural*. These categories and the illustrative examples that follow can be useful guides to what to look for in examining the nature and extent of hidden curriculum at a particular institution.

Structural or organizational aspects of hidden curriculum include time scheduling of classes and other school activities; facilities provided; materials, such as textbooks and computer software; examinations; required courses; special programs, such as speech therapy or higher level programs (seen more in the IB system and American AP system); extracurricular activities and services; and grading and grouping policies.

Cultural aspects of hidden curriculum include school norms or ethos; décor and wall decorations; roles and relationships, including intergroup relations (within and between teachers and students); student cliques, school traditions, and celebrations; and teacher expectations of various groups of students.

In India, even though textbooks preach gender equality, the hidden curriculum in most schools still undermine girls. According to Arpan Tulsiya, a Senior Research Scholar at the Department of Social Work at Delhi University, who went and observed schools, both male and female teachers initiated twice the number of

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interactions with boys than girls, which included verbal interactions like encouragement and discussion of higher order questions. These also included non-verbal interactions like giving more time to answer a question, nodding towards them, looking at their side while teaching and walking more between boys' side of the row in the segregated class and so on. Only high performing girls were found to interact with the teacher, at par with boys.

Hence, through an unequal division of their time, attention and energies as well as their interpretation and illustration of the textbook content, teachers were often found to subvert the formal curricular goal of achieving gender equality through education.

An example of positive influence of the hidden curriculum is to communicate the implicit, academic, social and cultural messages. These assumptions or unspoken expectations stipulate the "right" way to think, speak and behave in school. In the right balance they enforce discipline and focus while preparing the ground for interactions at the workplace and in formal situations where certain decorum is required.

The hidden curriculum therefore has advantages like preparing us for life in society while also having disadvantages like reproducing class inequalities.

The main focus of this research is to study the hidden curriculum in schools by understanding and analyzing various school structures that affect the aspects of socialization and identity formation in students. This paper aims to delve into the hidden curriculum, its various causes and consequences to try and find out if it truly prepares students for the real world or instead harms their chances by continuing a wicked cycle of expected behavior.

Hypothesis
"To what extent are school teachers aware of the hidden curriculum?"

Rationale for choosing hypothesis
I believe that education can greatly affect our country's development. With a young workforce, the government needs to ensure that its citizens are educated with well researched methods and content where unfavorable unintended messaging, that may affect the success of students in the future, are not being transferred. With the New Educational Policy (NEP2020) and a boom of edtech platforms, this is an opportunity to review and redefine outdated pedagogy. Mindful of the hidden curriculum we need to re-evaluate text and methods of teaching and assessment, and upgrade infrastructure that affects the intellectual generational growth.

The first step towards creating an education system that accounts for the hidden curriculum is to alert the primary medium through which these norms and values are getting transferred- the teachers. They must be trained to be cognizant of this transfer so that they may assess whether they are causing positive or negative consequences on the students' future. Awareness must be spread among policy makers, school authorities and the parent community to force change at the ground level. Systems and infrastructure upgrades must be conscious of reinforcing positive and desirous values.

II.   REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
Before getting into the Indian context, it is important to understand the phenomenon and how its awareness on the subject has developed worldwide. This can be studied through the works of some influential sociologists.

Philip Jackson (1968) is credited with first writing about the concept of hidden curriculum in his book 'Life in Classrooms'. He explains that once a child enters the stage of schooling in their life, they begin to associate the female teacher presence in a classroom to that of their mother at home. The teacher comes to acquire a great amount of power over the child's life and becomes instrumental in the child accepting unequal power distribution in the larger society too. He further illustrates how a teacher shapes the behavior of a child constantly through the use of praise and rewards. A child's achievement in a subject comes to revolve greatly around the positive and negative opinions of the teacher who constantly validates a students position and worth through evaluation. Thus, through these 'hidden structures' of schooling, a child comes to accept that the society has power positions ascribed to each member and assimilates the concepts of hegemony, inequality and status at an early age. This often gives structure to civil society at the cost of the individual's spirit to change or redefine its capabilities.

There are three dominant views on the ***political effects of the hidden curriculum***- *the traditional perspective, the liberal perspective and the radical perspective*. Giroux (2001) expounds upon three views:

He thinks that the traditional perspective on hidden curriculum is mainly concerned with "what makes the existing society possible?" In this approach the schools are believed to be engaged in 'cultural transmission.' For example, Independence Day celebrations at school. It uses the functionalist perspective to study the hidden curriculum that uncritically accepts the existing relationship between schools and the larger

society. The main focus is on the socialization process in schools that allow for the tacit transmission of dominant values and beliefs of the society.

The Liberal approach to curriculum analysis engages with the question of "how meaning gets produced in the classroom". This approach explores the "importance of intentionality, consciousness, and interpersonal relations in the construction of meaning". The focus is on the teacher-student interactions that promote active meaning construction by the students. For example, a teacher may pick on the brightest or weakest student to answer a question.

The radical approach uses the factors of political economy of a school and how "the processes of schooling function to reproduce and sustain the relations of dominance, exploitation and inequality between classes?" So, in essence the radical approach considers the influences of external socio-political contexts in determining the identity formation in schools. For example, propagating the superiority of the ruling class.

Although the concept of cultural capital could be considered as a subset of the knowledge of hidden curriculum, it gives us a powerful framework to draw out correlations with the radical approach of hidden curriculum. *Cultural capital* refers to the collection of non-economic forces such as family background, social class, and varying investments in and commitments to education, which influence academic success.

Bourdieu further classifies **cultural capital** *into three different categories – embodied, objectified and institutionalized.*

The embodied capital represents what a person knows and can do. It is directly linked to, and incorporated within an individual's identity. This form of capital cannot be transmitted instantaneously. Investing time into self-improvement in the form of learning is one way of further developing one's embodied cultural capital. For example, a student may have a talent for music or art.

Cultural goods, material objects such as books, paintings, flags, instruments, or machines, all represent the objectified form of cultural capital. Objectified cultural capital can be appropriated symbolically through embodied capital, or even materially through economic capital.

Finally, cultural capital in its institutionalized state provides academic credentials and qualifications which create a 'certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture' (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 50). These academic qualifications can then be used as a metric for conversion between cultural and economic capital.

Bourdieu favours nurture over nature throughout his writing. He mentions that the time and cultural capital invested in children by their parents, molds their abilities and subsequently their cultural capital. He claims that 'the initial accumulation of cultural capital, the precondition for the fast, easy accumulation of every kind of useful cultural capital, starts at the outset, without delay, without wasted time, only for the offspring of families endowed with strong cultural capital' and 'the scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family' (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 48).

Bourdieu has also defined social capital, which is determined by the expanse of an individual's network of relations, the resources possessed by these relations, and how successfully and quickly can these resources be set into action. All types of capital are considered to be derivable from, as well as convertible to economic capital. Bourdieu also states that although cultural capital and social capital are fundamentally rooted in economic capital, they can never be entirely reduced to an economic form. Rather, this concealed relationship highlights their effectiveness.

Texts

Saurabh Khanna in his paper "Hidden Curriculum: Learning and Experiences" analyses the multiple structures and processes that socialize students, exercise control over them, as well as mold their identities in the Indian context. He highlights the conflicting interests of different sections towards deciding the worth of knowledge. He argues for the social nature of knowledge, and the fact that the meaning and usage of texts are contested by communities with distinctly different interests (Apple, 2000, p. 181). Textbooks cannot be simply considered as carriers of ideas alone. They can be sold on the market for profit and have an economic value as well. Moreover, authority possessed by the state to regulate textbook content provides them a political value as well.

The dominant groups control the cultural capital by defining textbook content which legitimizes their knowledge as worth knowing. An instance can be found in the history textbook controversy that emerged after the new National Curriculum Framework (NCF) was implemented by the BJP-NDA government in India in 2001. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) was asked to delete specific passages from textbooks with immediate effects, without consulting the Parliament, or even getting approval from the advisory CABE committee (Mukherjee & Mukherjee, 2001). There was a deliberate muddling of facts by resorting to revisionism, for instance, by mentioning that the Qutab Minar in Delhi was built by Samudragupta (a Hindu king), and not by the Sultanate ruler Qutb-ud-din Aibak. There was also a marginalization of the Muslims by referring to them as 'invaders', who looted the nation for centuries. The reference group here, that is the Hindu

elite, was using the medium of texts to legitimize their ideology at scale, as well as to redefine their knowledge alone as worthy cultural capital.

This reference group also varies with the situation, as can be seen in the 'Speaking volumes' article by Levknecht and Ramanathan (2006). Three history textbooks, based on the exact same curricular standards but published by different religious publishing houses, depict their own religion in a positive light by deliberate omission and commission of details. For instance, the invasion by Mahmud Ghazni is worded in the Hindu text as "he destroyed idol worship by waging jihad or holy war". The Christian text adds a positive bend to it by mentioning the "idol breaker who was trying to reform the religions of the area". The Islamic text treats these invasions with a bland fervor, and rather emphasizes the "good Ghazni did for learning and religion with those riches" (Levknecht & Ramanathan, 2006, p. 3856). The portrayal of Aurangzeb in his history textbook, that of a 'tyrant' who tormented all non-Muslims. No mention was ever made of the 'farmans' (administrative orders) he issued to maintain Hindu temples or the lands he donated for construction of Jain temples. Such processes of socializing readers (students here) through skewed examples, by re-orienting consciousness and propagating their cultural superiority, are meant to establish an effective form of social control.

Such biases in textbook content contribute to student identity formation as well, since they set multiple parameters for exclusion. For instance, a Muslim (or any non-Hindu) student will feel excluded when a history text describes all non-Hindus as being of foreign origin. Apart from these religious overtones, a single national identity is propagated through our education policy and language texts may be questioned as it does not appreciate our diversity and differences.

The text has also subtly become a means of bodily and ideological regulation. Apple cites an example where a school principal was unhappy with the school teacher because even though her student was reading well, he was not reading in a 'proper way'

The meaning of a text is not intrinsic to it. It is a 'product of the system of differences into which the text is articulated' (Apple, 2000, p. 191). Apple, an educational theorist, also identifies three ways in which readers respond to a text – *dominant, negotiated, and oppositional.*

A dominant response accepts the textual messages at face value, a negotiated response accepts most of the textual messages except for a few disputed claims, and an oppositional one rejects all dominant interpretations of the text. His point here is that readers do not just passively receive texts, but interpret it subjectively. However, this also provides leeway for counter-hegemonic interpretations that may function to minimize the impact of the dominant hidden curriculum, as pointed out by Giroux and Penna.

Classroom Practices

Although Talcott Parsons' (1961) functionalist views align more with the traditional approach to hidden curriculum, we can gain ample knowledge of socialization processes from his works. He has viewed the classroom as a unit analyzing the socialization prevalent in schools (Parsons, 1961, p. 435). The nature of this socialization is to prepare the child for their adult role. Building upon this theoretical basis, he mentions the current trend of educational and occupational upgrading, and draws attention to the reasons why certain students reach college while others do not. Parsons proposes that the selection for college happens in junior high school itself, based on the relative excellence in living up to the expectations imposed by a teacher as a future agent of the adult society. Due to relatively similar family backgrounds and equal ages, Parsons argues that the differentiation in the classroom occurs along a single main axis – that of achievement. This falls in line with the structural functionalists' views exalting equal opportunity and meritocracy. The achievement here is further broken down into cognitive (technical mastery and empirical knowledge), and moral (good work habits) components.

It is argued that the child's socialization in the school classroom, through the peer group as well as the teacher, results in the outcomes that – the child is emancipated from his primary emotional attachment to the family; he or she internalizes social norms a level higher than family alone; he or she gets differentiated based on actual achievement (including a differential valuation of that achievement); and from society's view point, a selection and allocation of human resources occurs in accordance with the acquired adult role. Khanna clearly recall that since my elementary grades, he had gradually internalized this motivation for achievement and the authority of selection procedures based on differential achievement. Then, during his secondary grades, his attention shifted towards what Parsons calls a *differentiation based on qualitative types of achievement* (cognitive and moral). He saw this all as a natural progression, since these grades were going to be a launch pad for his future occupational roles. Parsons mentions how a secondary school student interacts with multiple subject teachers, unlike in elementary grades where mostly one teacher caters to multiple subjects. He is also exposed to optional elective courses. Consequently, the child forms associations with a diverse group of people – both adults and same age peers.

While the child's socialization is not under his own control through his family and school, peer group provides the child with a form of 'voluntary association'. This voluntariness was visible through the continuous making and breaking pattern of his own childhood friendships. The peer group provides the child with an

opportunity to exercise independence from adult control by associating with those of equal status (in terms of age). Secondly, the child is introduced to a source of non-adult approval and acceptance, by showcasing his or her prowess, as well as gaining a sense of belonging to the group. Parsons also realizes that a system of selective rewarding creates a status-differentiation within the school class. He mentions that extra emphasis on school success might disrupt the child's association with family and peers. He also blames this selective rewarding system is a cause for the rising *anti-intellectualism* in America. Moreover, due to the rising levels of minimum acceptable qualifications, persons at the lower end of the achievement spectrum are forced into a state of repudiation of these expectations. While peer group dynamics serve as an object of emotional dependence outside the family in elementary grades, at the secondary school stage they further showcase themselves as youth culture. There is an emergence of cross-sex relationships, as well as a much sharper prestige stratification of informal peer groupings. Khanna remembers his adolescent years when maintaining a worthwhile image in front of his classmates meant the world to me. If he could showcase his skill or prowess by painting or playing the guitar to his friends, it was an even better ego boost. So was impressing the opposite gender. The youth culture also has a selective function of differentiating people who will play different roles as adults. Hence, it is acting as a 'bridge between the achievement order and the adult stratification system of communities' (Parsons, 1961, p. 451).

Parsons also interestingly compares and contrasts the role of a teacher with that of a parent, arising out of a generalize superiority due to adult status relative to children. Citing larger numbers of female teachers, he mentions the continuity represented by a 'woman teacher' with the role of a 'mother'. At the same time though, he differentiates saying that the role of a teacher is much more universalistic in nature, since she has to look after a larger number of students along with differentially rewarding their achievements as well. Khanna's students used to call him 'bhaiya' (brother), which was still alluding to an adult authority. Even though he had developed a strong attachment with them, he always had to try and stay objective in his role of evaluating them on multiple parameters as a teacher.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methods

The primary research method for the purpose of this study is the questionnaire method. The questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents. It was administered through google form, that was sent via email and WhatsApp, which will conveniently facilitate the collection of large amounts of data with relative ease. The respondents were permitted to answer at their own convenience, as well as ask any doubts, to ensure generation of fairly reliable and extensive data. The data collected will be both quantitative, easy to compute and compare, as well as qualitative, providing more detailed and rich information, through the use of close and open-ended questions respectively.

Target Population

The target population for this study i.e. sample population selected for the purpose of conducting this research is high school teachers. The questionnaire was administrated to this section of population as this is the group that needs to be aware of the 'hidden curriculum' so that unfavorable lessons may not be passed on. It is important to include multiple genders and age groups to establish a base that may allow one to gauge the complete awareness of this phenomenon. Senior School/ high school teachers have been specifically chosen for this study since they are presumed to have the highest qualification at school level. Furthermore, these teachers have influence over students that are about to enter society and hence, the impact of these biases can be easily measured.

Sample Size

The sample size for the purpose of this study was between 30 and 40 respondents, in order to have a sample size that is both manageable, while still being representative

Research Site

The research site will be online. The questionnaire was disseminated through WhatsApp and Email to teachers in schools across the Delhi NCR Region. Given the constraints of the virus, this was the safest site that provided a sufficient amount of reliable data.

| Table 1		
Participant's Characteristics	**Number of Participants (n=32)**	**Percentage**
1. Grades Taught		
Grade 9	26	81.25%
Grade 10	26	81.25%
Grade 11	23	71.88%
Grade 12	23	71.88%

Survey Results

Are you aware of the concept of the "Hidden Curriculum"?
32 responses
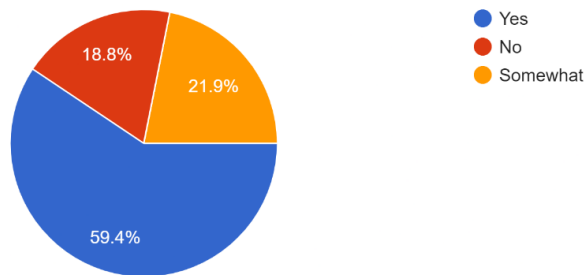
Graph 1

According to the survey (and graph 1), only a 59.4% of respondents were aware that a concept like this exists, 18.8% were outright unaware and 21.9% were somewhat aware of the phenomenon

Do you think that some things in the classroom are taught unintentionally?
32 responses
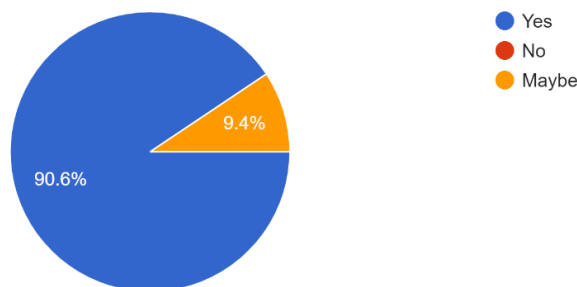
Graph 2

90.6% of the respondents were aware that unintentional lessons can be passed on in the classroom setting, and 9.4% answered maybe. However, No respondent thought that unintentional lessons cannot be passed on in the clasrooom setting.

Are you conscious of the various social cues and practices you are teaching to your students?
32 responses

● Yes
● No
● Somewhat

15.6%

84.4%
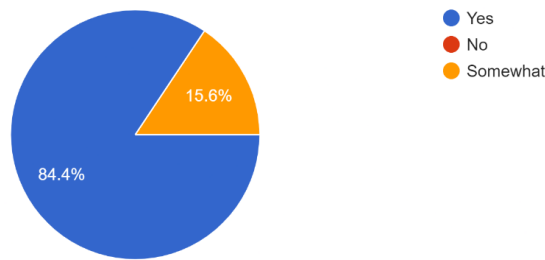
Graph 3

84.4% were aware that social cues and practices were being passed on the to students and 15.6% answered maybe. Here again, no respondent answered no

Do you think these social cues and practices will impact them in how they conduct themselves in and perceive the "real world"?
32 responses

● Yes
● No
● Maybe

18.8%

81.3%
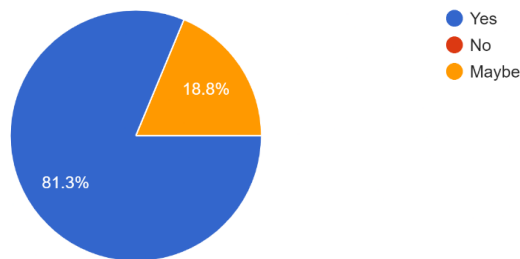
Graph 4

81.3% of teachers think that the social cues and practices passed on in the classroom will impact how they conduct and perceive themselves in the 'real world' and 18.8% teachers are unsure.

Are you aware of the hidden biases and inconsistencies in your syllabi?
32 responses

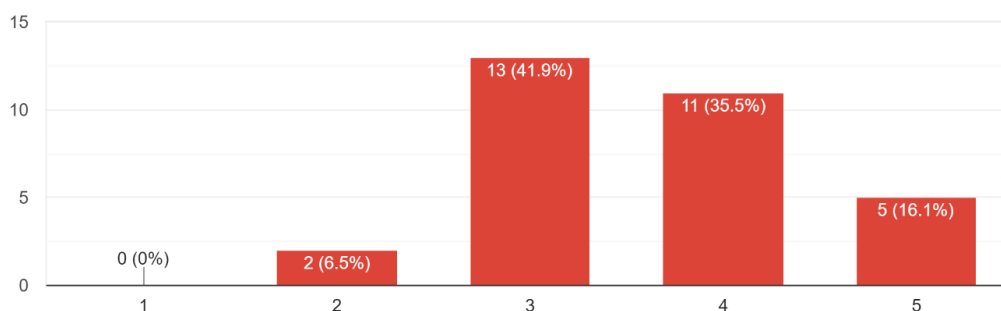● Yes
● No
● Somewhat

18.8%

75%
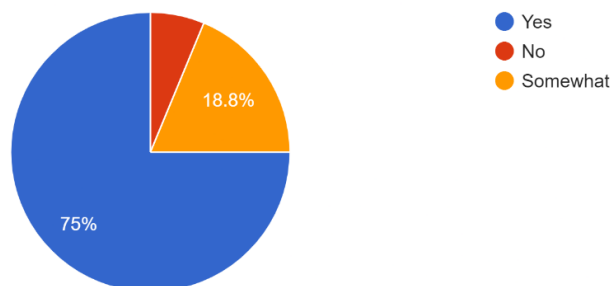
Graph 5

Graph 5 shows that although 75% teachers do think there are hidden inconsistencies and biases in their syllabi and 18.8% are unsure, 6.3% respond that they do not find these biases in their syllabi

To what extent do you think textbooks and syllabi are politicized?
31 responses

Graph 6

It is also noticed that all teachers think that their textbooks are politicized, with 41.9%, 35.5% marking the 3 and 4 respectively on a scale of 5, 5 being most politicized.

From these graphs, it is seen that although high school teachers are not formally aware of the phenomenon and not actively looking for its instances, majority of teachers have informally noticed the symptoms of the hidden curriculum. It also has to be considered that the target population consists mainly of respondents teaching in elite private schools across Delhi NCR with access to the internet. It is therefore predicted that teachers teaching in lower-level public schools or in 2nd and 3rd tier cities with less access to internet and education will have even lower awareness about this concept and may not have noticed the perpetuation of its instances.

IV.   CONCLUSION

Linda Dickerson's dissertation, "A Postmodern View Of The Hidden Curriculum" used Odysseus as an apt metaphor for the effects of the hidden curriculum. Just as Odysseus was close to home many times on his journey home, but was blown off course by powerful winds so are we in education blown off course by prevailing societal and political groups as they challenge one another for control. On his journey home one of the many hidden challenges that Odysseus encountered was the "Lotus Eaters", and in the same manner that Odysseus' sailors became trapped on the Island of the lotus eaters, once they had partaken of its fruits, so it is that students may find their journey through school halted by the use of drugs. Another challenge that Odysseus faced was the Cyclops, Polythemus, who with his one large eye might represent those in education that have tunnel vision and are only concerned for personal agendas and was also easily fooled just as students are sometimes fooled by peers and the educational 35 system and as a result, they lose sight of their personal educational goals. Some are lost and never find their way home. Odysseus' ultimate goal was to return to his home on the isle of Ithaca to be with his beloved Penelope and our educational goals should be to investigate both the overt and covert curriculum so that it adequately serves all students equally. Odysseus survived every obstacle that was thrown in his path to discourage his journey home. His courage, determination, wit and endurance enabled him to survive each and every difficulty and to finally arrive home safely. *Some students survive the system also through perseverance and hard work, but others are lost in the turmoil and confusion.*

Throughout these examples, she has shown the effects the hidden curriculum has on students during schooling in today's world.

Our society needs individuals to develop the capability of deliberate reasoning of their situation in their immediate social context, empathize with those living in conditions different from theirs and identify the concept of good lives for themselves. We need to train teachers to impart education to children with a deep sociological understanding of educational aims and hence, the critical pedagogy should be adopted during teacher training. Such pedagogy problematizes education and makes teacher and students learn to question assumptions, paradigms and hegemonic characteristics of the society there by enabling school structures to be fluid in nature.

Understanding the concept of hidden curriculum and being aware of its effects on students is the first step in eliminating the ill effects of unstated norms and biases of the people and structures in a school. One might argue that if hidden curriculum has such far-reaching consequences of affecting and shaping an individual's identity and social life then care should be taken to abolish it in its entirety. However benevolent this idea might be, it is impractical to attempt it; since every individual involved in imparting formal education

to a child comes with his/her own socio-political and cultural beliefs and actions of such beings cannot ever be independent of those beliefs.

Therefore, a milder yet reflective and deliberate attempt needs to be made by trying to keep the negative consequences of the hidden curriculum at a minimum level.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Annexure 1 - Questionnaire and Results

Q1) Grades you teach

Grade 9	26
Grade 10	26
Grade 11	23
Grade 12	23

Q2) Are you aware of the concept of hidden curriculum

Yes	19
No	6
Somewhat	8

Q3) Do you think somethings in the classroom are taught unintentionally

Yes	29
No	4
Maybe	0

Q4) Are you conscious of the various social cues and practices you are teaching to your students?

Yes	27
No	0
Somewhat	6

Q5) Do you think these social cues and practices will impact them in how they conduct themselves in and perceive the "real world"?

Yes	27
No	0
Maybe	6

Q6) Are you aware of the hidden biases and inconsistencies in your syllabi?

Yes	25
No	2
Somewhat	6

Q7) To what extent do you think textbooks and syllabi are politicized?

1 (least politicized)	0
2	3
3	13
4	11
5 (most politicized)	5