The Influences of a Hidden Curriculum on Students’ Character Development Using the Illuminative Evaluation Model

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Abstract. This study aimed to determine whether the Illuminative Evaluation Model, with its three-stage framework: Investigate, Inquire Further, and Explain, can be used as a methodology in understanding the influences of the hidden curriculum on the character development of preschool students. In Stage 1 Investigate, document analysis, observations, and interviews were conducted to examine the characteristics which were targeted to be developed through the formal curriculum, and the deviations and unintended outcomes that occurred during implementation. In Stage 2 Inquire Further, surveys, structured observations, and focus-group discussions were conducted to progressively focus on selected issues. In Stage 3 Explain, principles and patterns were organized to describe the hidden curriculum. In conclusion, the Illuminative Evaluation Model was found to be effective as a tool in determining the influences of a hidden curriculum on students’ character development.

Keywords: curriculum evaluation, Illuminative Evaluation Model, hidden curriculum, qualitative evaluation, character development

Introduction

Conventional approaches to curriculum evaluation are often within the paradigm of the experimental and psychometric traditions wherein objective methods are more prominent (Parlett & Hamilton, 1972). This has led to evaluation results which are often restricted in scope due to these approaches’ failure to account for the more subtle aspects of curriculum implementation, one of which is the hidden curriculum.

This study intends to inquire whether the instructional evaluation model developed by Malcolm Parlett and David Hamilton named Illuminative Evaluation Model, which stands within the alternative anthropological paradigm, can be used to determine the influences of the hidden curriculum on students’ character development. Under this paradigm, this study intends to provide a complete picture of the educational program (Madaus, Scriven, & Stufflebeam, 1983; Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993).

The Illuminative Evaluation Model

The characteristics of the Illuminative Evaluation Model (IEM) which makes it fit for such study on the hidden curriculum involve the following: (1) it deals with description and interpretation rather than measurement and prediction, (2) it uses the instructional system and the learning milieu as central concepts, (3) it is appropriate for dealing with questions which lack precision, and (4) it is commonly used in small-scale curriculum projects pertaining to the context of a classroom or classrooms in a school (Parlett & Hamilton, 1972; Lubiano, 2013). Though used as a model for the purpose of curriculum evaluation, the IEM, as asserted by the authors, is ‘not a standard methodological package but a general research strategy...The choice of research tactics follows not from research doctrine, but from decisions in each case as to the best available techniques: the problem defines the methods used, not vice versa’ (Parlett & Hamilton, 1972, p. 17).

Following this precept, the IEM follows three stages. The first stage, Investigate, is more ethnographic in nature in that the researcher familiarizes herself thoroughly with the instructional system, which is a catalog description containing the idealised specification of the school’s program; and the learning milieu, which refers to the social-psychological and material environment of the school (Parlett & Hamilton, 1972). The second step is to Inquire Further, wherein phenomena, occurrences or groups of opinions are selected for intensive inquiry. Whatever emergent issues or themes found to be critical in identifying underlying problems, interrelationships among variables, and invisible realities are given focus with the goal of finding real explanations of issues. The third stage, Explain, consists of interpretation and explanation. From the collected data and information, the
and information, the researcher then seeks for principles, themes, and patterns which may explain organizational structures, reveal cause-and-effect relationships and situate messages and meanings in a broader explanatory context (Lubiano, 2013).

The Hidden Curriculum and Character Development

The hidden curriculum, as coined and used by Philip Jackson in his 1960s pioneering work, refers to the ‘unpublicised features of school life’ (Jackson, 1968, p.17). It has also been called the ‘implicit curriculum’ or the ‘unwritten curriculum,’ highlighting how it involves values, expectations, and outcomes or by-products of schooling which are not generally included in the formal curriculum but are learned by students, thus influencing the character and direction of their lives (Eisner, 1985; Martin, 1976; King, 1986; Goodlad, 1984). Due to the latent transmission and reinforcement of attitudes and behaviours inherent in the hidden curriculum, it was perceived as having functional roles in providing the elements of socialization in the maintenance of society or even in becoming oppressive agencies of domination through cultural reproduction (Hlebowitsh, 1994; Vallance, 1973).

Character development, which is heavily influenced by social factors, is a crucial aspect of student development. This is, however, rarely given focus due to the constant pressure in schools to prioritise cognitive development and other areas of literacy (Priest, 2007). Due to its nature, character education is primarily induced through conditioning students into certain socialising skills, behaviours, and attitudes which schools find as essential conventions needed to sustain collective life (Margolis, 2001).

In the case of sectarian schools, central to the development of students’ character is spiritual development as it relates to the principles of their religion. Aside from that, the process of character development, when seen from a general theoretical stance involves the cultivation of three critical aspects of a person, namely, the cognitive, the emotional, and the behavioural side (Windmiller, Lambert, & Turiel, 1980).

Hence, in the study of character development among students as it relates to the hidden curriculum, it is necessary that methods used would consider the following: (1) real school settings wherein the study would be conducted, (2) multiplicity of sources to serve as evidence in identifying the components of the hidden curriculum, (3) the educational processes which provide meanings to the how’s and why’s of the hidden curriculum, (4) the absence of a predetermined thesis in order to come up with emergent themes and synthesis about it, and (5) a comprehensive survey of the different actors, i.e. teachers, students, parents, administrators, etc., who play a role in its formulation and sustenance (Cobanoglu & Engin Demir, 2014). It is to these considerations which this study responds to.

Research Aims and Conceptual Framework

This paper sought to determine whether the IEM for curriculum evaluation with its three-step framework – (1) Investigate, (2) Inquire Further, (3) Explain – can be used in understanding and analysing the hidden curriculum and its influences on the character development of preschool students. This study focused on the preschool level so as to avoid or minimize the multiplicity of factors which come into play in a student’s character development as a student grows in age and educational level.

In order to get an accurate and more complete picture of the curriculum as it was implemented, evaluation should proceed beyond the intended to that of the learned curriculum. It is in the spaces and gaps between these two that the hidden curriculum primarily functions. An understanding of the dynamics of these would require a comprehensive description of the learning milieu through which the details of the implementation process occur. The model espouses the collection of data from four main methods: observations, interviews, questionnaires and tests, and documentary and background sources (Parlett & Hamilton, 1972). As a study on the hidden curriculum, the last stage of the evaluation is on the interpretation and analysis of the reasons for, and responses to, the deviations and unintended outcomes in order to form general principles and patterns describing the hidden curriculum and its influences on students’ character development.

The diagram below is derived from the explication model to describe the framework employed in this research study on the influences of the hidden curriculum on character development using the IEM:
The Three-step Framework

This study is a descriptive research which seeks to provide a complete picture of the interaction of various factors which come to determine the school’s hidden curriculum. The study employed naturalistic methods, wherein the researcher was a participant-observer in the school environment, experiencing what it meant to be a teacher and/or a student.

The research proceeded for approximately four months in a private Christian school in San Juan City whose main thrust is to provide quality education to students in a Christian environment while striving to teach students to look at the world with a Biblical perspective. The school studied has as its primary objective the promotion of Christian education which attests to the highest standards of morality, Christian behaviour and academic excellence as conditioned by a Christian environment. The processes and contexts by which this objective is sought to be achieved are carefully looked into with the aim of understanding the hidden curriculum through its professed goals and environment.

The school has three preschool levels with single sections each: Pre-Kinder 1 has seven students, Pre-Kinder 2 has eight, while Kindergarten has ten, totaling 25. Total population sample of the preschool level of the school was employed in order to examine key characteristics of each differing level, and at the same time to compare the reinforcement and progression of initiatives on character development across increasing preschool levels.

The time period involved was the start of classes for school year 2015-2016, thus involving adjustment periods especially for the Pre-Kinder 1 students. Due to the overlapping schedules of the preschool classes, the researcher did alternate observations in such a way that for one day she would be with the Pre-Kinder 1 and Pre-Kinder 2 classes, and for the next, with the Kindergarten class, and so on.

This research focused on one school only as the model is commonly used in small-scale curriculum projects pertaining to specific classroom contexts (cited in Lubiano, 2013). The selection of the sample and the site were found to be appropriate for this study since its main thrust is to focus and conduct in-depth investigations in a specific context, rather than generalisability to other settings. The focus was on the particular set of characteristics that were developed in students in their preschool years since these constitute the critical stage of learning wherein a student is ushered into schooling, and therefore into its formal and hidden curricula (Brofenbrenner, 1994; King, 1986).

The study followed the model’s three-step framework: (1) Investigate, (2) Inquire Further, and (3) Explain, as well as the model’s recommended research instruments.
In Stage 1, the instructional system was understood and described through initial document analysis of the school manual, (containing the policies, vision, mission, philosophy, goals, etc.), formal curriculum for kindergarten, the Department of Education’s learning standards for kindergarten, preschool textbooks, teachers’ lesson plans and unit plans, and students’ and teachers’ profiles. From here, the learning milieu was examined through daily classroom observations; interviews with key people from the administration, preschool teachers, and select school personnel; and further document analysis of relevant documents. The goal of examining the learning milieu was to identify key characteristics that were targeted to be developed among the students through the formal curriculum, and the deviations that occurred during its implementation.

For Stage 2, selected concerns and deviations found pertinent to an understanding of the influences of the hidden curriculum to character development were identified. With the aim of progressively focusing upon these issues, surveys were distributed to parents, structured daily observations were conducted, and a focus-group discussion was held with the three preschool advisers.

Lastly, Stage 3 involved the validation of initial findings with the administration through another focus-group discussion.

Data analysis for the qualitative information gathered through document analysis, interviews, focus-group discussions, and observations, mainly proceeded through the identification of concepts, categories and themes (CCT) which emerged. From the surveys, coding and descriptive statistics were used to supplement initial data. Finally, data was organised into overarching themes which describe the influences of the hidden curriculum on students’ character development.

Results

Student characteristics targeted to be developed through the formal curriculum

During Stage 1 Investigate, the instructional system and the learning milieu were explored resulting in the identification of these five key traits: (1) godly leadership, (2) Lordship of Christ, (3) excellent Christian lifestyle, (4) lives of legacy, and (5) global competence. As a Christian school, the primacy of putting Christ as central to the students’ lives and encouraging them to take the lead in influencing other people for evangelistic purposes and for humanitarian causes is part of its ulterior goals. At the same time, excellence in both the academic and spiritual aspects is envisioned among its students to make them competent wherever they eventually choose to be and in whatever field they may take.

Deviations and unintended outcomes for progressive focusing

In Stage 2 Inquire Further, progressive focusing was conducted on the following concerns: (1) repetitive cases of disobedience; (2) self-centred leadership; (3) prejudicial treatment of, and attitude towards, classmates; (4) lack of interest and lazy disposition towards studying; (5) sexually-related cases; (6) incongruent teaching philosophies; (7) inconsistency in implementation of language policies; and, (8) management and policy concerns.

General principles and patterns of cause and effect in students’ character development influenced by the hidden curriculum

The discussion in Stage 3 Explain focused on five distinct aspects of the hidden curriculum, namely: (1) the inculcation of school values and principles, (2) approaches to character development, (3) development of readiness for formal schooling, (4) functions of the physical environment, and (5) managerial and policy concerns beyond the classroom doors.

The inculcation of school values and principles proceeded through the hidden curriculum in the form of (a) formal ceremonies such as their weekly mini-church services and flag ceremonies which transmit values of godliness and excellence, spiritual and academic integration, the school as a family, and leadership; (b) class routines centered on specific class rules which enforce the importance of praying at all times, following authority, and individual achievement; and (c) the memorization of Scripture verses in imparting the Bible as the source of truth, and the role of rote memorization in breeding eventual life application of these verses.

As a Christian school, character development is explicit in the school’s formal curriculum. However, the strategies employed are not. These approaches to character development are thus subsumed in the hidden curriculum and involve the following: (a) social conventions conditioned through moral principles, (b) use of dialogue and reflection, (c) system of accountability, (d) role playing/role modeling, (e) publicly addressing behavior, (f) reference to authority figure/use of fear, (g) direct teaching/practice of behavioral skills, (h) system of rewards and punishment, (i) teacher conference, (j) parent-teacher conference, and (k) positive confession of behavior. Most of these approaches are parallel with some of the general techniques supporting character
development which are subsumed under the concept of prosocial guidance (cited in Priest, 2007). Other approaches, however, specifically the use of rewards and punishment, have been regarded as unfitting for developmental discipline due to its inability to encourage discipline based on internal values and intrinsic motivation (Priest, 2007).

Another aspect of the hidden curriculum in the school involves the activities which influence character development by training students to develop readiness for formal schooling. These activities were accomplished through (a) training for independence through classroom routines, (b) providing constant practice on writing skills, (c) habituating them into an increased volume of subjects as compared to the typical load of preschool students, and (d) orienting children into maturing roles and activities. Aside from these, the hidden curriculum also played a role through the physical environment of the preschool rooms and of the very school itself (Margolis, 2001) such that it conditioned them into (a) being more independent, (b) becoming more aware of their behaviour due to close monitoring, (c) being disciplined within the confines of the classroom, and (d) being appreciative of a rather meager representation of nature within the school facilities. Lastly, the hidden curriculum’s impact existed beyond concerns within the classroom doors and into the more personal nature of (a) teacher personality factors, (b) teacher and administration connections, and (c) the pervading conception of teaching as a ministry, which were crucial elements influencing students’ character development from a more organisational perspective.

The hidden curriculum: disparities and features

Aside from these findings derived from the research problems, it was realized that the focus of the explication process (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1993) – from which the IEM is derived – in exposing the disparities between goals and outcomes served to limit the process. Part of the findings of this research study is concerned with the methodology used in uncovering the dynamics of the hidden curriculum. The focus on deviations or inconsistencies made it challenging for the researcher in a context wherein positive results were being gathered initially. As observed, the hidden curriculum, in terms of the school environment and the approaches to behaviour correction worked accordingly to positively develop the character of the students. As such, conceiving the hidden curriculum merely in the context of deviations and inconsistencies did not work to illuminate it but rather to limit it.

Based on the study, it is crucial that an understanding of the dynamics of the hidden curriculum be represented both in spaces pertaining to deviations or inconsistencies, and just the same through the reinforcement of school goals as evident through recurring trends or incidents. The first stage of investigation should take into account both the ways by which the instructional system worked and did not work in the context of the learning milieu. Incidents which produce similar effects also have to be considered so as to highlight the significant features of the program, for the hidden curriculum can both serve to fulfill or to deviate from the instructional system.

Hence, in the study of the hidden curriculum, these two aspects – disparities and features – should be taken into account so as to present a more complete picture of how the intended curriculum interplays with the hidden curriculum to form the learned curriculum.

Conclusions

In summary, three conclusions have been derived from this study. First, the IEM, as a tool or method, was indeed effective in determining the influences of the hidden curriculum on students’ character development. The three-stage framework of the model helped to accomplish the process of illumination by bringing out the realities and complexities of the interaction between the intended and the learned curriculum, and the gaps and spaces in the interplay of the instructional system and the learning milieu; thus, the dynamics of the hidden curriculum.

Secondly, the hidden curriculum involves the processes, settings, and situations – inherent in the learning milieu, thus, conditioning the learned curriculum – which are not explicitly stated in the intended curriculum but influence the character and experience of the members of the school community, whether intentionally or unintentionally. The intended curriculum interplays with the hidden curriculum through the contexts and conditions during program implementation allowing students to internalise certain modes of behaviour, perspectives, and attitudes which prove foundational to the development of their character as they eventually move on to higher levels in their schooling. The dynamics of the hidden curriculum may work intentionally in the accomplishment of the school’s curricular goals, or rather unintentionally in the frustration of these goals.

Lastly, in the study of the hidden curriculum, the IEM should take into account not only the disparities, but also the features evident between the school goals and the outcomes. In the course of the study, the researcher found it necessary that apart from
deviations or disparities, the school’s features – as evident in common incidents or recurring trends – leading to consistencies between school goals and outcomes be examined as well.

References


