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Sociology of Education: The Null Curriculum

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Looking at the image above, is a teacher's view of the classroom. The majority of the students are well disciplined with their heads glued to their books about the famous philosopher Plato. The students appear interested in their study of the philosopher apart from one student. That one student is not concentrated at all. Instead, the student has play dough sitting on his desk. The student does not fit in with the class, maybe the student is forced to sit in philosophy class? The image above does not show any interaction between students; hence they are all reading their textbooks individually and are not discussing the topic they are learning with their peers. Perhaps if the teacher put the students into groupwork, the student who looks confused could possibly enjoy the learning experience and would not be distracted because of his lack of concentration. I chose this image because I feel it matches in well with my chosen theme The Null Curriculum which is the part of curriculum which is not taught in schools and is left out (Eisner, 2002). The Null

curriculum is the main focus in this essay while the Hidden Curriculum will be touched on throughout the essay. In this essay, I plan to review the role of the null curriculum within education and schooling from a functionalist perspective.

Functionalism is founded on an opinion that society is a system of interdependent parts thought together by a shared culture or a valued consensus, an arrangement between society's members about what values are important (Functionalist perspective). The main function of education according to Durkheim is to train children their main function as members and workers of the larger society. Durkheim differentiates the "individual being" and the "social being". The role of education in his opinion is to form the social being, the different groups we are part of that express us. While Durkheim believes the growth of the individual being is essential, the critical function of education is the socialisation of children outside the family, to membership in the bigger group. Education according to Durkheim, assists two basic needs of society. To prepare children in acceptable numbers to perform a wide variety of social roles required for a complex modern society and to adjust to and continue as the world's and our society's conditions change. To ensure that children obtain the skills, attitudes, and values required to confirm that society can both accomplish and sustain enough social solidarity to survive, and that both citizens and workers trust in the system and wish to remain part of it (Social and Structure of Education, p.47).

Jackson (1968) centres around the psychological features of schooling which socialise students in influential ways. Praise, crowds and power are three components of the hidden curriculum which give rise to the norms of behaviour in classrooms. Jackson analyses hidden curriculum as a 'functionalist' outlook as it is assumed that goals and functions are

promoted in schools of the wider society depending on how arrangements within schools operate or function. Each student must comply with these coping necessities which give rise to norms and values in order to develop satisfactory through the school. Rather than creativity being taught to students, schooling satisfactorily teaches conformity which brings the 'reward' of acceptable negotiation of school life (Jackson, 1968). Eisner (1985) refers that the null curriculum is that part of curriculum in schools that is not taught. Eisner states that "subjects that are now taught are part of a tradition, and traditions create expectations". Schools neglect visual, auditory and metaphoric ways of knowing. Therefore, what is not taught in school cannot have an effect on students or enable them to express ability, aptitude or in fact inability. It is argued that what is not taught in schools may be just as significant as what is taught (Eisner, 1985). Regarding content, Eisner believes that economics, psychology, law and anthropology are examples subjects possible to fall into the null curriculum in secondary and elementary schools. This dimension of the null curriculum can be considered in terms of a hierarchy where parts of information is left absent from the exclusion of entire disciplines. It is claimed that schools should not involve themselves in the transfer of values at all by some critics of schooling (Bereiter, 1973). Cognitive functions are often considered the more significant part of this contradiction when it comes to the preparation of educational goals, affect is often divided from cognitive functions. There are certain feelings and degrees of feeling that schools do not want to bring about in classrooms. Hutchins (1972) view on the theoretical approach to the null curriculum, the "best" interprets into a fundamental of traditional academic subjects such as mathematics, history, languages and science, a trained intellect. Unless the null curriculum includes foundations from some universe of content is believed as educationally significant, then any meaning of a null curriculum becomes meaningless. This means in this framework, only in relation to what we value as

educationally significant, a given null curriculum can be recognised. By purely examining an existing curriculum the null curriculum cannot be described completely (Flinders.D, Noddings. N, 1986). The perception of the null curriculum focuses on the curriculum that is neglected and concentrates on how the curriculum is theoretically designed and applied. It opens opportunities for thinking which is not advised by other curricula to students which then means its educational potential and significance have been ignored. Causes of the null curriculum would likely be the teacher's deficiency in knowledge, preferences of educational administrators and biases of instructors (Gholami et al. 2016). There are three different types of null curriculum, the intended null curriculum is when the politicians or authors of textbooks eliminate certain parts of the content, what they remove are not suitably associated to meet the needs of the learner. The implemented null curriculum is when the teachers or school officials due to lack of interest and need in students exclude certain parts of textbooks. The experiential null curriculum is when students exclude certain parts of the textbook that they are uninterested in (Assemi A, Sheikhzade M, 2013). The null curriculum is a type of curriculum in which some features are left out either intentionally or unintentionally from the classroom. Eisner pointed out the fact that what is left out from what is taught daily, can be just as important as what is included (Eisner, 2002). The null curriculum can describe the lack of satisfactory progress around standards or aims more precisely than the explicit or hidden curriculum alone (Gholami et al, 2016). The importance in the brief summaries of functionalism and conflict theory comprehends that educators, mostly in their previous part of their profession, require to progress a deeper level understanding of the institution known as school and its function in our social system.

What is unrecognised, unidentified and unspoken, can be taken-for-granted in ways that is not questioned and not examined. It is essential for educators to move past the everyday level of classrooms and schools to understand educational institutional in their societal context which needs attention. The importance of advanced content or instructional modifications, the foundation of any educational training programme, graduate or area is by no way devalued, instead it contextualises it. This approves of educators developing from increasingly deskilled specialists to productive social and educational critics who have the knowledge and logical capacity to inspect their roles and the part of their schools in the development of the students, our society (Roger T. Wilson, 2011). The final function aided by the observation to the null curriculum helps define the opportunities and limitations for curriculum implementation, which moves on from the focus of content selection to the focus on classroom structure, the accessibility of resources and school policy. Schools where students hardly ever work together in carrying out academic tasks or problem solving like the image above. Cooperative problem solving is highly recognised by the goals of the school and community. There are many questions raised such as in order to provide activities based on cooperative problem-solving what knowledge and support would teachers need? Asking about what is not taught brings about the element that curriculum practice is closely concerned not only with the nature of learning, but also with the nature of valuing and of schooling (Flinders. D.J, Noddings. N, Thornton. S.J, 1986). As Eisner (1985) stated, the null curriculum is that part of curriculum in schools that is not taught instead subjects that are now taught are part of a tradition which create expectations. Looking at the boy in the image learning about Plato is not creating an expectation of him. It can be seen that schools can disregard or reduce visual, auditory and metaphoric ways of knowing. Perhaps, the student is more of a visual learner who needs to see the work of Plato through images, videos and discussions rather

than reading from a textbook. Possibly, if the teacher could teach in a way that could suit all learners in the class then the same student in the image would not look so confused. Referring to the image above, the students in the classroom are not engaged in working together at all. They are all sitting down individually at their own desks separated from their classmates. Maybe if they were all involved carrying out academic tasks and problem solving together, the boy in the image who looks distracted would probably tune in and come out of the classroom with plenty of knowledge about Plato.

Looking back at the image of the students with their heads all stuck in their books and most of them not knowing what they want to be career wise reminds me of what I was like. I truly think that we all go through school and some of us still do not know what we want to pursue as a career to this day. People end up in jobs that they have no interest in or was just not suited to from the start. I know I didn't, we had so many subjects to study, home work to do and grinds to go to. I was too focused on studying higher level biology as my teacher told me that I should drop down to ordinary level, with all the hard work I put in I received a H3 in my leaving cert exam. I also did a bit of part time work in my local supermarket. I hardly had time to think about what I wanted to do. I was told by so many people that my kind nature, patience and compassion would be well suited to nursing. I never really thought about it, I put it down on my CAO (Central Applications Office). I was told by many people that "it's a job for life" and a "pensionable job". I continued on with my study for the leaving cert, not truly knowing what I do want to become after school. Then when the round one offers came out, I got nursing, I didn't really know how to feel. My family and friends were delighted for me but my mother

who knows me best had a feeling that It wouldn't suit me. I was eighteen at the time and all of my friends were heading off to college and I wanted to go to college too. I began my chosen course nursing only to realise that it really didn't suit me after I finished my placement in a hospital. I started to realise what I loved best, art. I was told that there are not many jobs in the line of art. My mother believed in me and always knew art was my chosen path to follow so I started an art portfolio and here I am studying art and education. I often feel that schools do not teach us about the real world and career possibilities that there are outside the classroom. What is not taught in school cannot enable students to reveal or express their abilities or inabilities when looking at what I have discussed about the null curriculum. Perhaps, if I was taught the theory of nursing and what is involved in it, would I have known if it would have suited me back when I was in leaving cert, therefore I wouldn't have gone through first year to find out it didn't suit me.

Conclusion

To conclude this essay, there are many parts of the Irish schooling system that I never learnt during my years of schooling, topics such as the Theory Test to start learning how to drive and how to prepare for an interview for jobs. It is difficult for a lot of students to sit down and study for a theory test when it is up to yourself when to book it and when to start studying for it. It is important for students to know how to prepare themselves for an interview in order to have part time summer jobs. It is disheartening for students who fail to get a job because their interview didn't go to plan. The majority of students in the image above, may have to deal with disappointment from not getting a job because they

are not taught how to prepare for an interview. Preparing for the Theory Test and an interview are just two examples of what is not taught in school, there are so many more which is known as the null curriculum.

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