

The hidden curriculum as doxa: experiences of the working class

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Further Reading

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| ***What is the hidden curriculum all about?***

We might think of the hidden curriculum as being the implicit

- *ways of thinking about the world*
- *set of values and understandings*
- *ideas and perspectives*

that are embedded in the objects, practices, transmission and social structures of formal education.

The hidden curriculum – facilitated by teachers in all educational sectors – delivers social class oriented sub-texts and meanings.

This in turn facilitates the construction of knowledge and behaviour - leading to compliance with dominant ideologies.

| *What is the hidden curriculum all about?*

We could think of the hidden curriculum as being delivered by a particular habitus.

In turn, the hidden curriculum then transmits that particular habitus.

All of this is a classed process.

What is habitus?

It is one of Pierre Bourdieu's key concepts - but perhaps slightly enigmatic.

| ***What is the hidden curriculum all about?***

Habitus comprises a system of;

- *dispositions which generate perceptions*
- *appreciations*
- *understandings*
- *opinions*
- *practices*

So habitus is structured by an individual's past and present circumstances e.g. family upbringing, educational experiences, social class.

Habitus is structuring in that it helps to shape our present and future practices.

| ***What is the hidden curriculum all about?***

The political nature of education is evident in the views both teachers and students bring with them to a learning situation, in the way teaching and learning occur, in the forms of assessment and evaluation conducted, in the funding arrangements for an educational process, in the physical layout of a teaching and learning environment, in what appears and does not appear in the curriculum, in the justifications provided for education, in the reading and writing completed or recommended, in the value (or lack of it) placed on credentials and qualifications, in the language of instruction, and in the government policies that frame the learning process, among other ways.

Indeed, in the latter part of his career, Freire came to believe that Education is politics.

| ***What is the hidden curriculum all about?***

A crucial element in conservative assaults on reforms to university curricula was the charge that education had become 'political' and 'ideologically driven' [...]. This accusation, Freire would have argued, betrays either a naive understanding of the political dimensions to education or a mischievous attempt to disguise the politics of traditional pedagogical practices. Freire, along with dozens of scholars in critical pedagogy and the sociology of education, has convincingly demonstrated that teaching is always a political process.

From a Freirean point of view, it is not a matter of asking whether one ought or ought not to be political as a teacher, but rather of deciding what kind of politics to foster in the classroom.

| Breakout 1

What is the hidden curriculum all about?

| ***Why are Doxa and Illusio relevant to me?***

We can introduce Bourdieu's notion of doxa as "what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying"

Bourdieu goes on to say

.....the established cosmological and political order is perceived not as arbitrary, i.e. as one possible order among others, but as a self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes unquestioned, the agents' aspirations have the same limits as the objective conditions of which they are the product.

| *Why are Doxa and Illusio relevant to me?*

The taken for granted, the self-evident and critically unquestioned. The hidden curriculum is a doxa.

Undergraduate students, college students and school pupils that fail in their academic endeavours are considered simply not to be very academic – they failed the game.

This is the doxic assumption, rather than the critical approach which questions the nature of a game that appears to be fixed in favour of the dominant classes and cultures.

| *Why are Doxa and Illusio relevant to me?*

But why do people play the game?

What is it that seduces them to take part in this game, a game which “reproduces social inequality through the reproduction of the hierarchy of positions and capitals”

Bourdieu offers us a way to understand this situation, through illusio;

The “fact of being caught up in and by the game, of believing the game is ‘worth the candle’, or more simply, that playing is worth the effort”.

| *Why are Doxa and Illusio relevant to me?*

The success that individuals generate from partaking in the game and the various forms of capital that flows from this success means that they “have the game under the skin”.

We take part “regardless of whether all of the players agree with the game being played”

Or indeed that the players would agree with the rules of the game.....

“it is, therefore, illusio which prevents us from being cynical about the game being played because we take the game seriously”.

| Breakout 2

Why are doxa and illusio relevant to me?

| *How do I act in a critical way?*

It is difficult to acknowledge, but we are all complicit in the transmission of the doxic messages of the hidden curriculum.

The hidden curriculum, in plain sight on our university campuses, does not help to develop a culture of understanding, compassion and desire to enable not just equity of access but equity of experience and participation for all our students.

One academic notes “part of surviving an institution and making it in a profession is learning to ignore, or to become part of it, and so that it also all of a sudden dissolves, it becomes invisible. So then, we also become part of the institution”.

| *How do I act in a critical way?*

The danger is that we see the neoliberal careerist take over campus life.

Where the focus is on the gain of symbolic and economic capital and not becoming the public intellectual that can be part of the struggle to expose and remove the hidden curriculum.

We can choose not to allow the hidden curriculum to operate in plain sight, to challenge this doxa.

We can choose to believe in the emancipatory nature of education and not to facilitate its role in social reproduction.

We can choose to reach out in solidarity with our working class students in a generous and compassionate manner.

| How do I act in a critical way?

This is not an easy task, Bloom refers to “...our universities, wretched parodies of what they are supposed to be, are veritable monuments of newspeak and doublethink”.

In a study by Gair and Mullins, one of their interviewees notes;

“you need to be conscious when you are challenging the system so that you’re not doing it kind of naively. Through a lot of negotiations and struggles, people like myself have carved out spaces to do a different kind of work.... We carve out spaces, and the question then is how you actually operate in those spaces”.

| ***How do I act in a critical way?***

The first thing we can do is to consider *conscientisation*, as referred to by Freire.

This is the process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality through reflection and action.

'Conscientisation then is the most critical approach to reality, stripping it down so as to get to know the myths that deceive and perpetuate the dominating structure'.

So what's the second thing we can do?

| ***How do I act in a critical way?***

Freire makes it clear, however, that there are multiple ways of participating in the process of social transformation, and sometimes the most effective approaches, in the long term, are the quiet, unnoticed forms of gentle intellectual 'subversion' practiced by educationalists and others as they go about their daily work.

In other cases, protest demonstrations, union activities, letters to members of parliament, or critical journalism might be appropriate. Freire's point is that whatever we do, we cannot remain neutral: As intellectuals and educationalists, we are always being political beings. Intellectuals are always taking a stand, even this is an implied one, whether they acknowledge it or not.

| Breakout 3

How do I act in a critical way?

| *The working class student experience*

The hidden curriculum has an alignment process “that requires submitting to a distinct class based consciousness in order to acquire necessary symbolic capital..... elements of the hidden curriculum ultimately serve not only in the reproduction of both hierarchy and marginalisation, but alienation as well”.

Scott (2000) notes, “Everybody does not have to believe in the existence of class, nor constantly think of themselves in terms of class identity, for class to be a social division. The system of class situations is not dependant in people’s awareness of it”.

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s reflections from 1938: “That was always my experience – a poor boy in a rich town; a poor boy in a rich boy’s school; a poor boy in a rich man’s club at Princeton.”

| ***The working class student experience***

Diane Reay reports that working class students can complete their undergraduate studies “with a strong sense of being bruised and battered by the whole experience”.

It's like when you get the emails that say come and volunteer to save turtles, and pay £4000 to do it, you know. It's like the richest kids will get the best. I can't even afford to volunteer. 'Cause then I wouldn't have any money in the summer. (all Bio WP 3, State School, Scotland-domiciled)

Reay correctly highlights that “due to forces of circumstance, the majority of the working-class students were trapped in the present as ‘onlookers’ on student life, compelled by economic necessity to live at home and work in the labour market”

| *The working class student experience*

In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, Muriel Spark writes of her lead character

And many times throughout her life Sandy knew with a shock, when speaking to people whose childhood had been in Edinburgh, that there were other people's Edinburgh's quite different from hers, and with which she held only the names of districts and streets and monuments in common.

McLaren points out; “radical hope ...resists the fixity of interpretation that could turn it into despair, and refuses to abandon the moral principles which generate it, thus preventing it from becoming merely ‘wishful thinking’.”

We start with the premise that good teachers are intellectually curious about pedagogy.