



The 'Little Foxes' that Upset Students' Learning of Professionalism

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ABSTRACT

In this article the researcher seeks to provoke discussions on the unseen curriculum and its role on students' learning of professionalism. The article draws educators' attention to the formation of professional values through the concealed curriculum via examination of issues like how the veiled curriculum functions within education as a countervailing force to educators' push for professionalism. The article defines expert values as standards for specialized practice, which are based on the agreement of expert groups of people. Professional values like competence, honesty, confidentiality and appropriate language among other virtues, provide a framework for appraising the ideas and viewpoints that influence success at work place. The researcher responds to key concerns about pervasive calls emanating from unprofessional and academic onlookers alike to strengthen the teaching of professional values within the formal curriculum. She employed exploratory mixed methods design. She distributed 498 closed-ended questionnaires to randomly selected respondents at different times and interviewed ten key informants. The results revealed that it is possible to teach information about professional values, ethical reasoning, or improve understanding of professional language and ethical concepts, but course material or the formal curriculum is very limited in decisively influencing students' personality or ensuring moral conduct. The results also revealed that students learning of professional values takes place not within the formal curriculum but in a more subtle, less officially recognized curriculum. The researcher maintains that any attempt to develop a comprehensive professionalism curriculum must acknowledge the broader cultural milieu (the humanistic climate) within which that curriculum functions. The researcher concludes by proposing thorough exploration of the humanistic climate (the hidden curriculum) in which professionalism is caught rather than taught, which if made positive is likely to allow expertise principles to blossom among young workers.

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Introduction

If the thriving vineyard in Song of Solomon 2:15 is taken to mean the budding love affair between Solomon and his Shulammitte, bride-to-be, then the little foxes represent probable hitches in their environment that could hurt their relationship prior to marriage. Consequently, the bride-to-be suggests that they should take preventative measures to protect their amorousness from anything that could damage it. Likewise, educators need to be cautious of qualities that are accidentally conveyed through learning contexts' hidden curriculum which negatively affects students' learning of professionalism. According to Karimi, Zohreh Tahereh Ashktorah,; Easa Muhammadi & Heidar Ali Abedi (2014), "professionalism is the traditional part of a hidden curriculum", a concept that has been discussed for close to a century in education and social science literature. John Dewey (1938), in his book *Experience and Education*, asserts:

Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he or she is studying at the time. Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned (p. 20).

In the same vein Jerald (2006) argued that the hidden curriculum represents attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors, which are conveyed or communicated without aware intent through words and actions that are parts of the life of everyone in any learning context. Since professionalism is understood and caught rather than taught, negative role models are likely to contradict classroom professionalism lessons and student expectations, thus hindering holistic development among students. For this reason, educators must be conscious of the hidden curriculum and how it manifests itself in learning contexts. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines professionalization as the process of attaining professional values like accountability, truthfulness, excellence, and responsibility, to mention but a few.

The hidden curriculum is embedded in learning institutions' organizational structure, cultural inclinations, interrelationships and demeanors, which can either reinforce and stabilize students' professionalism or obstruct its development. Learning institutions are therefore better advised if they recognize the presence of the hidden curriculum in every teaching-learning activity and align its positive aspects with the formal curriculum while minimizing its negative effects.

This observation raises two important questions: to what extent are instructors familiar with the hidden curriculum as it relates to students' professional behavior and are educators aware that professionalism does not apply only to those with high education? Since every worker is essentially expected to demonstrate excellent professional skills like high moral standards, realistic work motivation, and self-confidence as well good relationship with colleagues which would make other people think of them as reliable, respectful, and competent, teaching-learning processes must encourage self-reflection on profession, professionalism and professionalization, throughout the continuum of students' schooling- from primary to higher learning. In this article the researcher frequently will use the three terms: "*profession*—a distinct category of occupational work"; "*professionalization*—“a process in which a professional group pursues, develops, acquires and maintains key characteristics of a profession” and "*professionalism*—the conduct, demeanor and standards which guide professionals work ethics”, as defined by Evetts (2009, p. 3-7), among other scholars. Even though study of professionalism and the related terms have a long-standing tradition in sociological research from the beginning of 20th century” (Crook, 2008), professionalism seems to be under threat as we often witness students (today and tomorrow's workforce), in expertise classes struggling with constructive criticism, admitting and correcting mistakes while others do the bare minimum to pass assignments. This means sorely teaching professionalism explicitly may bear very limited results because the unseen curriculum is as vital as the obvious curriculum in the teaching-learning process of professional values.

While the teaching-learning processes can and should prepare students to enter the professional workforce, something seems to be seriously amiss. The hidden curriculum which is considered by curriculum scholars like Cubukcu (2012) and Jusu (2018) as far more influential in the transmission of values, attitudes and behavior than the obvious curriculum, is often neglected and as a result, professionalization of students, which is caught rather than taught, is likely to fail without a conducive learning environment. It is next to impossibility for students to apply professional values such as being selfless, well-informed, skillful, and dutiful in their daily interactions with other people in the society when the connection between those professional attributes and real-life situations has not been practically demonstrated in the learning context. This means theoretically discussing professionalism without concrete relationships with the real world is likely to bear limited results any. According to Rogers, Boehler, Roberts & Johnson (2012), learning institutions' organizational structure, routines, and social interactions are the main means of transmitting ethical standards, cherished values and beliefs that are essential components of professionalism. Klick, Haythornthwaite, Shochet, Levine & Wright (2010) argued that students' lived experiences and their day-to-day immersion in their learning contexts is a very powerful influence on the development of their values including professional values.

The implication here is that learning institutions' display of professional values which students are expected to practice in their workplace not only rescues the discourse of professionalism from being forgotten but at the same time prevents acquisition of professional attributes from being taken for granted.

Learning institutions should therefore be cognizant of negative role models in students' learning experiences because they can and do increase the likelihood of students becoming pessimistic and espousing negative attitudes and mannerisms. As noted by Shaw (2006) among other scholars, when “inconsistencies exist between the knowledge taught by the formal curriculum and the perception generated by the hidden curriculum, the hidden curriculum carries more weight”. This means negative hidden curriculum elements can be a barrier in the nurture of professional values such as wise decision-making while positive hidden curriculum can help predict and improve professional behavior among present and future workforce.

The question then begs: has professional behavior development been taken seriously in the newly implemented competence-based curriculum in Kenya or is it merely a 'technical' response to students' misbehavior and unemployment? This question is central to this article since the researcher endeavors to explicate the important role played by hidden curricular in every teaching-learning process as the chief transmitter of professional values. The word 'role' may seem to indicate that the researcher will pinpoint exactly how and through which mechanisms the hidden curriculum is involved in professional values transmission, but the researcher does not claim to specify each and every causal relationship between students' acquisition of professional values and their immersion in their learning environment. She, rather, uses the word to emphasize her belief in that the hidden curriculum is the chief spreader of professional values among other values and it is an important element in the nurture of professional behavior. At the end the researcher will also suggest strategies for exposing hidden curriculum elements in professional education to enhance the nurture of resilient lifelong learners who embody professional values. The researcher believes exposing the hidden is likely to help educators create and nurture a culture that reflects expert behaviors and attitudes like integrity, diversity, equity, commitment to excellence, respect for human dignity, humility, compassion, awareness of interpersonal boundaries and independence to engage in open pursuit of knowledge, which would make contemporary young people professionally successful in their workplaces.

Materials

The concept hidden curriculum, which is frequently linked with schooling issues, is what students learn unintentionally including how to behave in a social setting but does not limit itself to learning institutions. In fact, hidden curriculum is an inherent part of every context including on the job mentorship practices (Martin, 1983). Since nowadays many workers are often more financially driven than they once were, improving the hidden curriculum, which comprises learning institutions' cultural subtexts as well as informal social interrelations like role modeling, unofficial discussions between faculty and students, and more concealed forces of organizational life such as the power organization and the architectural layout of the learning environments, the hidden curriculum is believed to shape how and what students will morally turn out be in and outside the school. As such, the hidden curriculum requires serious attention from educators who desire to nurture professionalism among students because for “better and sometimes for worse, the hidden curriculum functions as a powerful vehicle for learning” (David Stern, 2003).

Students imbibe the unintended messages such as “learning to accept order of authority, competitiveness, waiting for one’s turn, being patient and other functions of the wider society” (Jackson, 1968). This observation is in line with Michael Apple’s (1980) argument that the hidden curriculum has to do with instructors’ controlling of children’s behavior and perception of the world in a negative way as they have to “adjust their emotional responses to conform to those considered appropriate by their teachers” which sometimes imply constraining students’ behavior in the classroom and in the learning institution, which may in turn hinder their holistic development. For this reason, learning institutions should enhance and integrate positive hidden curriculum elements in the formal instructions to enhance students’ learning to be professionals. Instructors must also be cognizant of classroom sizes and furniture arrangement because they too affect students’ professional behavior development. According to Jusu (2018), among other scholars rectangular sitting arrangements subtly teach students “their position-a container to be filled and the position of the teacher as the guru who is there to dispense knowledge”. Such undented message instills in students the idea that if classrooms are not arranged in a rectangular form with a rectangular blackboard or a rectangular wall for PowerPoint projection, which is also rectangular, in front of students (Jusu, 2018), no authentic learning can take place. This means certain classroom arrangements can and in fact do negatively affect the teaching-learning process of professional values. Instructors must therefore rearrange classroom furniture-instead of having tables and chairs arranged in a formal way, students can sit in a circle without a table in front or in teams with the tables joined together to avoid thwarting students’ intellectual virtue of thoughtful learning. Instructors can also split classes into small groups so as to devote quality time to each individual group of students. This way professional values learning stops being what the teacher does but rather what the learner does as the teacher facilitates students’ acquisition of professional values.

Component	Explanation
Professional morals ideals	Adheres to lawful and moral guidelines Upholds professional ideals defined for specific professions Exhibits specialized demeanor and edifying relationships with other people Values different cultures, races, gender, including people with special needs
Continuous self-professional advancement	Acts as a thoughtful practitioner Willingly seeks professional knowledge and skill Participates in ongoing professional renewal Behaves appropriately, takes risks, steps out of his or her comfort zone when need be Embraces practices of a life-long learner like knowledge investigation
Taking part in professionalism progression activities	Serves as role model for other educators Is a team player in the advancement of professionalism Contributes to the advancement of professionalism like informative paper presentations, writing etc.

Table 1 provides a summary of three key elements of professionalism, as noted by Georgia Department of

Education (2016), that this researcher believes learning environments must be designed in a manner that enhances instilling in the young generation.

As stated earlier professional behaviors are more learned through observation and imitation in learning institutions corridors or even the cafeteria rather than formal lecture sessions, hence, preoccupation with designing new formal curriculum with standardized ways of assessing its accomplishment tests is likely to communicate wrong messages like immeasurable attributes like professional values are not important. Instructors may not even be aware they are communicating such unintended messages, but students easily notice them. Students sense the implicit messages much faster compared to their instructors because some of the unintended messages communicate through the hidden curriculum force them to behave in ways they do not always like. For instance, students quickly learn that they must unquestioningly conform to certain rules in their learning institution if they want their instructors’ endorsement. According to Terry Anderson (2001), there are three historical ways of viewing the unwritten curriculum:

1. To mean a kind of brainwashing that maintains social privilege--or a kind of mysterious knowledge or practices imposed on the official curriculum
2. To refer to the understated effects of the learning context where official teaching-learning processes takes place
3. To refer to the unspoken rules necessary for one’s success in the formal education

Irrespective of whichever view people adopt, the desired outcome should be students’ holistic development-including knowledge, skills, behaviors and professional values. Thus, in line with Wiggins & McTighe, (2004), an education that holistically nurtures students requires planning the curriculum backward as planners seek to answers the question: what professional values students are expected to have attained at the end of their schooling. This means rather than using the old curriculum idea of teaching with the teacher controlling students’ learning process, teachers become coaches or facilitators in socializing students into holistic professionals, who take responsibility and ownership in social development. In such an education students and teachers collaborate in sharing the learning experience as willing partners in the teaching-learning process.

Methodology

Considering the topic of the current research about the role of the hidden curriculum components in the nurture of professionalism among students, this article incorporated findings from two research studies: explanatory mixed methods research whose statistical sample was 486 respondents randomly selected from two Christian universities in Nairobi City County and a smaller quantitative study, whose statistical sample was 12 respondents (10% of non-teaching staff) in one Christian university. The researcher also interviewed 10 purposively selected participants. Despite its claim of objectivity and neutrality, professionalism is inherently value laden, which necessitated incorporation of the qualitative aspect of research. The qualitative approach included face-to-face interviews and experience which are just as valuable for knowledge acquisition as quantitative data collection strategies. The researcher distributed 486 closed-ended questionnaires to randomly selected undergraduate students between July and September 2018 and followed with face-to-face interviews with 10 participants. Between January to April 2019 the

researcher distributed 12 different closed-closed questionnaires to non-teaching staff (10%) of a Christian university in Nairobi City County. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of the 64-item questionnaire as well as the 20-item questionnaire was $r .834$ and $.781$ respectively. The content validity of the two instruments was confirmed through expert reviewers. All the data collected through the questionnaires were analyzed at descriptive and inferential level using SPSS.

Discussions of the Research Findings

The findings reported in this article suggests that one of the reasons why students may be failing to develop professional behavior is the lack of demonstration of professional values which means role models are not living the professionalism they desire to see in students or they fail to remember that values are caught rather than taught. In addition, students who do not understand the cost and benefit of professionalism are often not motivated to develop desired professional values. The 10 participants who took part in the qualitative part of the research did not talk of some powerful lectures they had on professional values, they instead talked about role models and mentors—of faculty members and their peers who demonstrated to them what it means to be a professional teacher, business man/woman or pastor, when asked how they learned to act professionally. The individuals they referred to as mentors may not even be aware they are mentors perceived as so, while those who were not referred to as mentors may believe that they are always mentoring but probably in the reverse direction. The implication here is that hidden curriculum lessons do not take place during specified times in the official curriculum but professional values like all other values are taught chiefly in the cracks of the formal curriculum—places where both positive and negative values are caught rather than taught.

The findings also confirmed that there needs not be a powerful lecture on commitment to work, humility and integrity as fundamental principles of professionalism; rather, faculty members need to demonstrate professional commitment to work and their honesty and students will catch them. This argument is in line with scholars like Cubukcu (2012) who argued that unstated curriculum elements are a powerful tool in transmission of values, but the negative invisible curriculum elements are more potent than the positive ones. The implication here is that instructors must provide a viable framework for appraising the unseen curriculum effects on professional behavior so as to remedy contradicting aspects before they hurt the process. Entrenching professional values in learning institutions' informal curriculum is a major policy for inculcating professional values in students. Only a small part of learning institutions' culture is transmitted via formal education instead students learn how to react to real life issues professionally through what they see other people do. The regression analysis of the research conducted by the researcher between July and September in 2018 among 486 randomly selected undergraduate students from two Christian universities in Nairobi City County concurred with other research findings and suggested that students' acquisition of virtues is significantly influenced by the hidden curriculum. An F statistic of 9.481 as indicated in table 1, which was greater than the critical value of 2.46, led to rejection of the four key pedagogical related null hypotheses. This means learning institutions' organizational structure, interrelationships, instructional models and cultural

orientation are good predictors of students, worldview (values, beliefs, attitudes and behavior) and have a significant influence on student's worldview (Nyamai, 2018, p. 91):

Table 1. Analysis of variance.

Indicator	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	37.924	4	9.481	280.172	.000 ^b
Residual	7.986	236	.034		
Total	45.910	240			

The descriptive statistics of the research the researcher conducted between January and February in 2019 among (12), 10% of non-teaching staff in one Christian university in Nairobi City County, indicated that all respondents agreed that they learned enthusiasm to work from the joy they saw in their teachers as they carried out their teaching duties. Over 90% of them agreed that their teachers' pride in teaching inspired them to love work while their teachers' interest in every student cheered them as they carried on with their duties. Over 60% of the respondents agreed that they learned the importance of adhering to professional values from the way their learning institutions' boards of management performed their tasks. About 70% of the respondents agree that they learned professionalism from their teachers' demeanor. Over 80% of the respondents agreed that they learned how to search and share information, involve themselves with developmental activities outside the school, recognize gaps in professional practices and application of professional values in situations from their learning institutions' cultural orientation. Almost all respondents (96%) agreed that they learned the importance of mentorship, team teaching, appreciation of constructive criticism and open dialogue from unplanned happenings in their learning institutions. About 80% of the respondents agreed that they learned the value accepting their strengths and weaknesses from the way their teachers accepted their failures. The respondents also agreed that they learned how to set high and reasonable personal performance expectations from how things were done in their learning institutions. These findings concur with the other findings of the research conducted among 486 undergraduate students as well as other findings, that learning institutions' organizational structure, interrelationships, cultural orientations as well instructional strategies can and do facilitate or hinder student's acquisition of values.

The implication here is that an ineffective approach to teaching professionalism can and does hinder holistic nurture of students as it denies students opportunities to have open dialogue and brainstorm on professional values in relation to their fields of interest. On the other hand, effective approaches to teaching professionalism and holistic worldview aligns positive aspects of the hidden curriculum with the formal curriculum as well as provides students with opportunities to experience real life issues. This means uncovering the hidden curriculum, integrating its positive aspects with the formal curriculum, as well as developing approaches to mitigate its negative aspects may be the best solution to the hidden curriculum' negative effects on students' learning of professionalism. Educators should, therefore, promote edifying humanistic climate in learning institutions that are rich with the virtues necessary for the empowering process of students.

Conclusions

When designing and developing the official curriculum educators must be cognizant of all the unseen curriculum's

elements because it is a major influence of education. Learning institutions' social milieu is a complex system of influences-including diverse role models and the hierarchy of the education system contributing to the formation of professional values and attitudes among students, but educators are better advised if they pay more attention the complexities of the hidden curriculum. The implication here is that what is taught in the classroom must be reinforced and enhanced by what is practiced in every teaching-learning activity. Thus, learning environments must display the professional values that young people are expected to demonstrate like respect, inquiry, and honesty as well as empower them to bravely raise concerns about unprofessional practices. For this reason, instructors must design strategies for encountering the concealed curriculum negative outcomes. Specifying and unveiling the hidden curriculum can prevent it from residing in what some scholars refer as the black box. This observation is in line with Dawn Rosenberg McKay's (2018) argument that if we agree that unstated values and beliefs are part and parcel of professionalism development, we are admitting that the concealed curriculum influences students' ways of perceiving the world and their position in it which ultimately affects their professionalism. Rosenberg McKay further suggested several professional values that workers must demonstrate in their work places:

1. Always making it a priority to be on time because when one arrives late for work or meetings, it gives his or her boss and co-workers the impression that he or she does not care about his or her job and since it affects them, it is like saying he or she does not value their time.
2. Dressing appropriately for work because always appearing neat and clean demonstrates you value your work and yourself.
3. Watching your mouth because swearing or cursing—whatever one may call it—has no place in any workplace.
4. Helping colleagues—a true professional is willing to help his or her co-workers when they are overburdened or facing a challenge at work. He or she is also not afraid of sharing knowledge, opinions, or simply an extra pair of hands.
5. Avoiding gossips—while one may be tempted to tell his or her neighbor what he or she heard about a colleague, gossiping makes one look like a middle school student.
6. Staying positive because negativity is contagious and complaining incessantly about your workplace is likely to bring your colleagues down.
7. Not running from your mistakes—as hard as it may be to do, own your mistakes and then do your best to correct them and avoid repeating the same mistakes.
8. Always fighting fair—while you inevitably may have occasional disagreements with your co-workers or even your boss, calmly explaining your opinion and being ready to walk away if you cannot sway the other person or if he or she begins to lose control, is professional.
9. Avoid lies or being dishonesty because it makes you look bad, whether it is lying on your resume or calling in sick when you are not. A true professional is always upfront.

In harmony with other scholars, this researcher laments that inculcation of these noble values may be hindered if the humanistic climate in learning institutions (the hidden curriculum) is not exposed, made positive and aligned with the formal curriculum as well eliminated or significantly minimized its negative effects. This observation concurs with Jerald's (2006) argument that the more educators are aware of

the hidden curriculum's influences on students the more they are likely to use it to students, advantage.

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