



A spotlight on...

Decolonising: Surfacing the hidden curriculum

Centre for Innovation in Education

Overview

The 'hidden curriculum' encompasses a range of implicit norms, values, beliefs and practices within academic life (Giroux and Penna, 1979:22). Educators are often immersed in their academic culture without realising that students may not share that culture and face invisible barriers to success. The hidden curriculum can affect both students' sense of belonging and their knowledge of the conditions needed for success (Hubbard, 2020).

Benefits

By uncovering the hidden curriculum, you will:

Alter the expectations of the 'traditional student'. Empower all students by offering alternative ways of doing administrative and pedagogical practices (Bhambra, Gebrial & Nisancioglu, 2018).

Increase students' critical thinking and new ideas.

Help students gain a 'critical feel for the game'. Allow all students to do well by equipping them to participate culturally in particular spaces (Dennis, 2018).



Putting into practice

Reflecting on your practice and becoming more aware of how you teach and assess students can help you start the process of uncovering the hidden curriculum.

Reading Lists

- Revitalise tired reading lists, becoming aware of good work in your discipline that you may have not noticed before. Whatever your background, diversify your syllabus; if only minorities within the community do this, it can send the unhelpful message that only those from minorities rate the work of minority authors.
- Acclimatise your learners to the presence of a range of writers, be that writers of colour, writers who identify as LGBT+ or other characteristics. People from minoritised and under-represented groups have identified this as important to improving their experience (Arshad, 2021).
- Explore reasons why certain authors are often excluded (race, gender, social class, faith) and juxtapose these voices with those in authority using 'the theme of silenced voices and dominant narratives' (Arshad, 2021).



Design & Delivery

- Identify the political implications of your specific pedagogic approaches. These may not be the ultimate drivers of your pedagogy but they are its inescapable by-products (Dennis, 2018:202). For example, consider whether western values of objectivity and individualism render other values such as subjectivity, collaboration and collectivism as lesser markers of intellectual achievement.
- Module organisation can be one form of hidden curriculum – e.g. a chronological approach may make it harder to include marginalised voices, whereas a thematic approach might open up the possibility of diversifying the curriculum (Bain, 2018).
- Be aware of how you use language: ‘even with basic terms like ‘they’, ‘them’, ‘we’, ‘us’, we need to be mindful of who is included or excluded in each of those words. Language is a key method some people will use to risk-assess the ‘safety’ or ‘positiveness’ of a learning environment’ (Arshad, 2021).
- Promote global citizenship among home students and integration of international students by identifying the challenges and embedding [internationalisation](#) strategies.
- Integrate multicultural group work to support international students (Asgari, 2019; Sedghi & Rushworth, 2017; Montgomery, 2009).

Assessment

- Use dialogic feedback. The way feedback is articulated can be exclusionary, with imperatives presenting ‘comments not as opinions but indisputable truths... and passive constructions...disguis[ing] both writer and marker agency’ (Johnson, 2020).
- Use rubrics to clarify how the assessment will be marked.
- Enable students to use their multilingual skills in your module (Preece, 2020).



Considerations and challenges

- Decolonisation of the curriculum will be an ongoing process of learning and unlearning for a cultural reset to occur, but starting somewhere and seeing it through is the only way this can be achieved.
- Reflect on the structural inequalities that have been hidden within our institution for too long and take an active part in deconstructing them so we can create a new and proud legacy’ (Hutfield, Lauren 2020).
- Bring the hidden curriculum out ‘into the open to allow it to be critiqued, and...ethnicity should be discussed as part of this’ (NUS/ UUK,2019:18)
- Bringing the hidden curriculum to the surface can help students from all backgrounds to assimilate to university culture, benefitting from knowing ‘the rules of the game’. However, ideally students from non-traditional backgrounds can also help to reimagine those very rules through the radical perspectives that accompany them (Hooks, 1989; Bali, 2021).

Additional Resources & References

Can you help us improve this resource or suggest a future one? Do you need this resource in an alternative format? Please contact us at cie@liverpool.ac.uk



A full list of [references](#) are available on the Centre for Innovation in Education website.