



WORK MATTERS

AUGUST 2022

COLUMN

The Student, the Hidden Curriculum and Higher Learning

In some respects, the rich and the poor members of society are focused on the same thing, one example is the secondary education of their children, which is associated with the approved school curriculum. If this was an ideal world, we could assume that all students would be able to succeed in achieving the basic goal of passing five and more subjects at CXC. The students from the prestigious/denominational schools arguably are cultured in what is known to us as the hidden curriculum of the schools. Equally arguably, is the point that there exists a different kind of hidden curriculum that is taught to students from the Government Secondary Schools.

The hidden curriculum refers to the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that students learn in schools, and to a large extent teaches them to accept their positions and stations in life. While the formal curriculum consists of the courses, lessons, and learning activities in which students participate, as well as the knowledge and skills teachers intentionally pass onto students; the hidden curriculum consists of the unspoken or implicit academic, social, and cultural messages that are communicated to students while they are members of the school. And it is this hidden curriculum that to a large extent, will determine their levels of compliance, obedience and productivity in society.

Further, it is also being suggested here, that the hidden curriculum symbiosis with the Pygmalion Effect will impact all students in today's online teaching framework. The Pygmalion Effect is a positive form of self-fulfilling prophecy and shows that teacher expectations influence student performance in a positive way.

Thus, the higher expectations of the teachers will usually lead to an increase in performance by the students. When we expect certain behaviours of others, we are likely to act in ways that make the expected behaviour more likely to occur; and this process has been observed in every type of group, whether educational, vocational or social.

Interestingly, it is not only the expectations of teach-

ers themselves that affect the performance and learning outcomes of students, but the teacher's unequal and differential behaviour and how students perceive and react to these differences. Teachers' behaviours vary according to expectations in four basic aspects, for example the pedagogical content and the presentation of the work, the expression opportunities granted to students, the emotional climate and verbal or non-verbal interactions with students. As opposed to the old or conventional ways of teaching, online learning, and the relationship between the teacher and student is separated by time and space. This definition includes both synchronous and asynchronous delivery formats. Transactional distance theory is important conceptually, since it proposes that the essential distance in distance education is transactional, not spatial or temporal.

The digital platforms have made synchronous and asynchronous interaction readily available, enabling interaction to become a key factor in online learning. The difference between accomplishing a higher performance and a positive attitude thus lies in the emotional interaction between the teacher and the student, the values and the high goals that are communicated.

In essence, I am suggesting that the Pygmalion Effect in the adult online learning environment describes how teachers' expectations and the ways that those are expressed and how they interact with students' expectations can affect the mood and the attitude of students, reducing the distance between teacher and learners.

Cultural expectations of the school's hidden curriculum have been highlighted in the academic, social, and behavioural expectations established by the way teachers communicate messages to students. For example, one teacher may give tough assignments and expect all students to do well on those assignments, while another teacher may give comparatively easy assignments and habitually award all students passing grades even when their quality of work is low.

In the high-expectation class, students may learn much more and experience a greater sense of accomplishment, whereas students in the low-expectation class may do just enough work to get by and be comparatively uninterested in the lessons they are being taught. It is not hard to see how this will affect the two groups of students in the future.

Similarly, schools may unconsciously treat students with differences (based on ethnicity, race, social class, migration status, or physical disabilities) affording them lower academic expectations, which may have the unintended or negative effects on their academic achievement, educational aspirations, or feelings of self-worth. As such, we need to be aware of this hidden curriculum, and endeavour to ensure that we are not disadvantaging the most vulnerable groups of our students in the country.

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