

Hidden Curriculum: Challenging the Quality of Educational Experiences

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Abstract

The present study revisits the world of school science. It looks at the factors leading to stress. The current paper raises concerns and issues about the 'quality' of educational experiences guaranteed for each child, in the Right to Education Act (2009). It attempts to uncover how hidden curriculum operates in insidious, but very powerful ways in the everyday discourse of school life through teachers' comments, feedback and remarks, which act to pose challenges and hamper the quality of educational experiences of children belonging to the less privileged strata of society. The authors have collected data from reflective journals of ten B.El.Ed fourth year students followed by three rounds of focus group discussions with the same set of students. Data has prominently revealed that teachers (not necessarily intentionally) often pass remarks on a child's family background, physical appearance, availing of state incentives and participation of a child in routinized activities of the school. Such remarks often jeopardize or question the spirit with which quality of an educational experience as intended for children of diverse backgrounds is planned at a policy level. However, the reasons of such remarks are outside the purview of this paper.

Introduction

Education was initially under state level legislations but each state would conceptualize this right based approach differently without uniform standards across India. By constitutional amendment of 1976, education was transferred to the concurrent list (both the parliament and state legislatures have the power to legislate over entries of the concurrent list). This was done to reinforce the integrative character of education, to maintain quality and standards, to generate human power for development, to promote excellence at all levels of education, to build a strong, uniform, cohesive policy on education (Aradhya & Kashyap, 2006). It is important for the state to make schools available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable, which is done through Right to Education Act (2009). Availability means education is available

to all in form of universal, free and compulsory state; accessibility refers to equal accessible to school services to all children regardless of gender, race, religion, ethnicity or socio-economic status; acceptability refers to education free from discrimination, relevant and culturally appropriate for all students; and adaptability refers to flexibility of educational programme and ability to adjust according to needs of and changes in the society.

RTE act (2009) aims at giving quality education in a school (p. 4). RTE Act has given a prominent role to teachers in providing quality and need based education to children. Hence, it is the duty and responsibility of a teacher to understand her role properly. Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (2011) asserts that the dedication and commitment of teachers have the potential to

transform schools and lives of children and it plays a significant role in achieving the objectives of the Right to Education Act. Economic Survey (2015-16) tabled in Parliament by finance minister Arun Jaitley states that "There is a need to improve the quality of education provided in schools to arrest and reverse the decline in enrolment in government schools and improve the educational outcomes in both public and private schools". Several studies on 'quality' of education highlights that there is a lack of consonance on the notion of quality i.e. how it should be understood and measured (Mehendale, 2014). Academicians have interpreted the quality of educational experiences in different ways. For instance, one of the ways Naik (1975) interprets quality is in terms of input and output. Input entails factors such as professional training of teachers, class size, quality of school building, curricula use and textbooks prescribed and output generally entails examination results (p 57). Kumar & Sarangpani (2004) interpret quality in two ways: One refers to the "essential attribute with which something may be identified and the second meaning refers to the rank or superiority of one thing over another". This paper envisions quality in two ways:- One in terms of 'Input' i.e. input given by the teachers in terms of remarks to the students in everyday discourse of the school. Other way of looking at quality is in terms of pedagogy and learning environment in relation to RTE Act (2009). Notion of quality as outlined in Section 29 (2 -f, g) of the act highlights that curriculum should be in mother-tongue as far as practicable, and it should help the child to be free from fear, anxiety and trauma and also help the child to express his views freely (Mehendale, 2014).

'Schools' are non-neutral institutions where mechanisms of exclusion and segregation operate. Such a view of the school uncovers and explores commonsense rules and knowledge that are often portrayed as pre-given, neutral and unchanging (Apple, 2004). Michael Apple refers to these mechanisms as 'hidden curriculum'. These are the norms and values that are implicitly but effectively

taught in schools and that are not usually talked about in a teacher's statement of end or goals (pp. 84). Schools are the sites that reinforce or put emphasis on select, certain meanings and practices, and neglect, exclude or reinterpret others, through many mechanisms such as teacher-student interaction, rules and regulations of the school, staff composition, student-student interaction, ability grouping, implicit meaning of the content of the text book, assessment mechanism etc. (Bishaw, 2007).

This paper attempts to analyze teachers' remarks in everyday classroom interactions and how they work in a hidden way affecting the quality of educational experiences of the children. Authors have collected the data from the reflective journals of ten B.El.Ed 4th year students of the same batch from one of the colleges of University of Delhi and three focus-group discussions with the same set of students. A random selection and study of thirty journal entries of each student teacher was done at the outset of the research which was followed by revisiting of certain journal entries as highlighted by the student teachers in focus group discussions. The objective was to identify and analyze certain episodes, incidents and narratives on teacher-student interactions as captured by the student teachers in their reflective journals. Reflective Journals of the student teachers were coded numerically from 1 to 10 w.r.t alphabetically order of the names of the student teacher.

This study is based on 'Interpretivists' research paradigm which emphasize on socially constructed reality. The question of interpreting data in context highlights the concern interpretivists have about the *situatedness* of knowledge. The goal of interpretive research is an understanding of a particular situation or context much more than the discovery of universal laws or rules. (Willis, 2007). To analyze data, the researchers have looked for meaning from the data available from reflective journals and focus-group discussions. Data helps in emerging important themes but findings are placed

in social context and the particular importance of it is that it is not generalizable to other contexts. The reason is something that happens in one classroom at a particular school and time needs not be necessary to happen in other school and classroom too. Through our data, it emerges that hidden curriculum manifest through teachers comments, feedbacks and interactions in daily discourse of school. This curriculum operates using different parameters emerging from the socio-economic background of learners. These comments are on the possible achievement levels and aspirations of the learners, physical appearance, availing different schemes or state incentives and the criteria of selection of children in different co-curricular activities of the school. The study uncovers that such manifestation of curriculum pose a threat to right based approach in education. This approach focusses on certain general principles such as non-discrimination and equality, looking after the best interest of the children, child participation in the school activities and survival and development of children (Aradhya & Kashyap, 2006). A rights-based model should develop capacity-building strategies for not only rights holders' to claim their rights but also for duty bearers to fulfil their obligations (ibid, p. 8). Conceptualizing a right based approach to education also entails the capacity building of both right holders to be aware of their rights and creating an enabling environment for the access of such right and duty bearers (including teachers) that entails human rights education and requisite professional training.

The teacher's interaction with the children is not only of the teacher and the taught but is coloured by a myriad of various informal or non-prescribed roles. Sarangpani (2003) stresses that this engagement can be based on adult-child relation where teacher being an adult is more experienced and mature and in a better position to exercise power over the child. The legitimization of power is further strengthened/by virtue of acting out as parents by the teachers and with the good intention

of correcting/moralizing the ways of children.

One of the ways through which hidden curriculum operates in a classroom by creating negative classroom culture is through 'teacher talk'. Unintentionally or intentionally, teachers create an atmosphere in a classroom by fostering hidden curriculum through such talk that is detrimental or demeaning for children. Following section of the paper discusses few features of this 'teacher talk' as emerging from the data.

Aspiration level:

Comments centered around possible achievement levels of the children, were very prominent across all the reflective journals. There was no respect shown towards the occupation of the family members of the children and many times, achievement level was seen as ascriptive in nature. The onus to achieve to learn and do well on the academic front is completely put on the shoulders of child and their family. Remarks were also targeted at the personal choice exercised by their parents of the number of children they wish to bear. Dalal (2015) quoting National Curriculum Framework (NCF)-2005 argues that learner identity is very important for promoting social justice and improved opportunities for the children but class identities and social milieu of a child often becomes a source of humiliation at the hands of official adults of the school (including teachers). In her research study, it was observed that humiliating remarks centred on the occupation of children's family (calling the children as *andewala*, *kelewala*, *lashanwali* etc.), location (*juggiwala*, *mandolawala*), father's first name (*Pappu*, *Chaman*), physical attributes (*mota*, *kala*, *lamba*, *ganda*, *bhadda*). NCF 2005 stresses to bring a home life of children inside the formal space of classroom but however, disapproving snide and nasty comments on children's background makes school an arena for legitimatizing class inequalities and provide ammunition for the teacher to pass hurtful remarks on the economic and cultural status of children. Some of the comments were:

“Students, you will not be able to do anything in your life. You will be doing the same job as your parents are doing like working in factories, vegetable vendors, domestic maid etc.

- 6th Class teacher, Government School (taken from Reflective Journal of Student teacher 5 dated 18th January, 2017)..

तुम अपना नाम लिखना ही सिख लो, पढ़ लिख के क्या करना है...

- 5th Class teacher, Government School (taken from Reflective Journal of Student teacher 3 dated 18th October, 2016)..

दसवी पास कर के, ब्यूटी पार्लर का कोर्स कर लेना या ब्यूटी पार्लर खोल लेना।-

7th Class teacher, Government School (taken from Reflective Journal of Student teacher 6 dated 24th January, 2017)

तुम इससे ज्यादा कर नहीं सकते, तुम्हारा दिम्माग मोटा है...

- 5th Class teacher, Government School (taken from Reflective Journal of Student teacher.2 dated 11th November, 2016).

तुम्हारे पेरेंट्स ने जन्म ही क्यों दिया जब कॉपी ही नहीं दे सकते. ..?

- 6th Class teacher, Government School (taken from Reflective Journal of Student teacher 10 dated 20th January, 2017).

Physical appearance:

The physical body of a child seems to have a neutral identity but it is always associated with certain social categories (Dalal, 2015). The hidden curriculum of a school centred on teacher's remarks often created a parallel between dirty bodies of children and filthy spaces from where they came. The ethos of a school comprising different kinds of factors play a key role in determining a quality of children's educational experience (Kumar & Sarangpani, 2004). Teacher is a significant factor

in determining, achieving and retaining quality of education. Even, National Policy on Education (1968) reckons that by saying “Of all the factors which determine quality of education and its contribution to national development, the teacher is undoubtedly the most important (p. 2)”.

Physical appearance including uniforms, hair styles etc. is a non-pedagogical issue to be engaged with as it seems to come under the realm of ‘maintaining discipline’. For instance, girls should part hair and make two plaits and put a ribbon of a specified colour on them, boys are not allowed to have long hair or spikes etc. The logical explanation given for the same is to maintain uniformity, to have personal hygiene, to remove distraction (difficulty in maintaining hair otherwise) etc. There is a certain expectation from the children to dress up in

The context of the conversation: Teacher pointing out to the student's head and stated:

इसका सारा सर वाइट हुआ पड़ा है, सोचो कितनी जुये होगी इसके सर मे, सर साफ नहीं करते हो तुम लोग, कितनी बार बोला है मेडिकर से सर धोया करो, खुद के सर मे जुये है टीचर्स के सर मे भी कर दोगी उनके पास खड़े हो के....

- 4th class teacher, Government school (taken from Reflective journal of Student teacher 1 dated 29th September, 2016).

इस तरह की चोटी मत बना के आया करो, ये तुम्हारा गाँव नहीं है।

- 4th class teacher, Government school (taken from Reflective Journal of Student teacher 8 dated 13th October, 2016).

यूनिफार्म के पैसे देते है हम, फिर भी खरीद के पहनते क्यों नहीं हो....

- 6th class teacher, Government School (taken from Reflective Journal of Student teacher 10 dated 17th January, 2017)

a particular way that is more appropriate for the

school and is not coherent with the way children dress up at home or in their community. School creates a divide between home life and school life, further alienating the children from school.

Incentives given by the State

Incentives given by the State are not perceived as a right or entitlement to the child. Instead, they are seen as pity models given to uplift the children of disadvantaged section of the society. Many teachers rather than viewing it as a welcome initiative to increase enrollment and retention of students in schools, use it to demoralize and demean them for availing such schemes.

The context of the conversation: An English classroom was in progress. Sports teacher came in the class and announced:

Those who are SC and ST come with me. We have to distribute the scholarship.

- 8th Class, Government School (taken from Reflective Journal of Student teacher 7 dated 17th January, 2017).

(Teacher telling to B.El.Ed student while pointing to children) ये बच्चे यहाँ सिर्फ खाने पीने आते हैं, पढ़ना लिखना थोड़े ही होता है इन्हें...

- 3rd Class, Government School (taken from Reflective Journal of student teacher 4 dated 10th November, 2016)

Participation:

The selection and promotion of children who are more articulate and help teachers in their personal work gives an impression of who an 'ideal' student can be and others should try to aspire for it. The whole selection process does not consider giving equal opportunity to every child based on their interests and inclinations and rather focuses on creating a convenient pool of select few students

who can be repeated and sent to inter and intra school competitions.

जो अच्छा काम करते हैं वृद्धाईंग का या टीचर का, उन्हें स्कूल की असेंबली या कम्पटीशन के लिए चुना जाता है

- Reflection of a student teacher 4 emerged from focus group discussion.

जो क्लास में ज्यादा बोलता है उसको टीचर असेम्बली में बोलने का मौका देती है

- Reflection of a student teacher 8 emerged from focus group discussion.

Concluding Remarks

To make schools more accessible, approachable and representative of children coming from diverse backgrounds, a teacher plays very crucial and critical role. However, from the above-mentioned discussion it is emerging a very powerful and influential set of the hidden curriculum where teachers' remarks are coming across to be demoralizing, insulting and exclusionary for children coming from the diverse backgrounds. It raises two pertinent questions: how it is compromising the quality of education as envisioned by RTE Act, 2009. Second, what possible impact can it have on children's attendance, retention and performance in a school. Authors have attempted to address the first question in this paper, leaving the second question to be explored through further research and exploration. Many recent research studies have established that teachers' remarks can affect children academic performance, emotional well being and their dropout rates (Akhtar, 2014). It then becomes the prerogative of teacher training programme to sensitize the teachers to move beyond technocratic rationality (Giroux, 1984). This means teachers are not only seen as transmitters of knowledge but as critical beings, who are able to interpret, question and deliberate their own perceptions, presumptions and stereotypes regarding the strengths, abilities

and achievements of their learners. Giroux (2004) further stresses on making teachers as 'transformative intellectuals' who can engage in pedagogy that is emancipatory in nature and can humanize themselves to overcome injustices and struggle for a qualitatively better world for all people.

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