ISSN 1392-0340 (Print)
ISSN 2029-0551 (Online)
https://doi.org/10.15823/p.2022.148.1

Pedagogika / Pedagogy
2022, t. 148, Nr. 4, p. 5–26 / Vol. 148, No. 4, pp. 5–26, 2022

VYTAUTO DIDŽIOJO UNIVERSITETO ŠVIETIMO AKADEMIJA

The Hidden Curriculum From the Perspective of School Counsellors in Slovenia

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Annotation. This article examines the hidden curriculum from the perspective of school counsellors. The main research questions ask what school counsellors understand by the hidden curriculum, how they define it, and how they respond to it. The findings show that school counsellors are familiar with the basic definitions, but a more in-depth analysis shows their understanding is incomplete. More attention should be paid to the presence of the hidden curriculum.

Keywords: *school counselling service, hidden curriculum, teachers, subjective and implicit theories, routine.*

Introduction

The school counselling service[1] makes an important contribution to the ethos of each educational institution. In Slovenia, its main tasks are defined in *Programme guidelines for school counselling services* (Programske smernice. Svetovalna služba v osnovni šoli [Programske smernice], 2008a; Programske smernice. Svetovalna služba v srednji šoli [Programske smernice], 2008b). In addition to performing the work as defined by the

[1] The school counselling service is specific to Slovenian schools, and it has some unique characteristics (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020; 2022). The school counselling service is one of the subsystems of each school or preschool; hence, its primary goal is determined by the primary goal of the school or preschool. Different experts (e.g., pedagogues, psychologists, social workers, social pedagogues, special and rehabilitation pedagogues, etc.) work in the school counselling service. It is an interdisciplinary professional school or preschool service.

guidelines, the service importantly co-shapes the values of each educational institution through its professional autonomy, both at the level of planned and written guidelines and the official curriculum, as well as at the level of everything that is not written. It defines much of the everyday life of educational institutions and influences the norms and values we learn at school, which are usually not discussed or planned. It is a phenomenon that educational theory generally refers to as the hidden curriculum. The phenomenon has been studied by different scholars (Apple, 1982; 1990; Gable, 2021; Giroux, 1978; Jackson, 1968; Kenti, 2009; Lynch, 1989; Öztok, 2020; Vallence, 1973) in the past, but rarely from the perspective of school counselling (Robinson & Kyle, 1982).

Decisions and actions in school counselling should result from reflection on professional and ethical conduct and a personal and moral assessment of the situation or action. The intuitive level also plays an important role, but on its own it is not enough. If an expert acts only on intuition, their decision can quickly turn out to be unprofessional and unethical. Counsellors' values, beliefs, subjective theories must be subject to constant reflection within the framework of professional guidelines and educational objectives and principles. If not, they may be taken over by unconsidered ideas, which make up the hidden curriculum.

The main research question in this article focuses on what school counsellors understand by the term *hidden curriculum*. Since school counsellors continually collaborate with other educators (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020), we analyse how school counsellors recognise the presence of the hidden curriculum in their own work and in the work of others. We also analyse how they respond to it. But first, let us describe the foundations of the school counselling service in Slovenia.

The framework for the school counselling service in Slovenia

The formal framework for the school counselling service in Slovenia is laid down in the *Organisation and Financing of Education Act* (Zakon o organizaciji in financiranju vzgoje in izobraževanja, 2022), which stipulates in Article 67 that public schools[2] shall have a counselling service to counsel children and adolescents, teachers and parents. It cooperates with teachers and the school management in planning, monitoring and evaluating the school development and in educational work (Zakon o organizaciji in financiranju vzgoje in izobraževanja, 2022 [Organisation and Financing of Education Act]). *Programme guidelines for school counselling services* (Programske smernice, 2008a; 2008b) constitute the principal conceptual document. They stipulate that the counselling

[2] The school system in Slovenia is divided into three sections of education**:** primary, secondary and tertiary (Slovenian education system and Slovenian Qualifications Framework, 2021; Zakon o organizaciji in financiranju vzgoje in izobraževanja, 2022). Primary education is provided by public and private preschools, primary schools, primary schools with an adapted education programme, music schools and educational institutions for children with special educational needs. Secondary education is provided by upper secondary schools and secondary schools. It is classified as general or vocational technical and secondary professional or technical education. In this article our focus is on public primary and secondary sections of education.

service operates at the developmental, preventive, remedial, and counselling/consulting levels (Programske smernice, 2008a; 2008b; see Bezić & Malešević, 2018; Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020; 2022), pursuing the fundamental educational goal of children's optimum development, regardless of their gender, social and cultural backgrounds, religion, nationality, and physical and mental constitution. The role of the counselling service is to participate, on the basis of its expertise and in a professionally autonomous way, in the complex resolution of pedagogical, psychological, and social issues at schools through three main activities: activities of assistance, activities of development and prevention, and activities of planning and evaluation (Programske smernice [Programme guidelines], 2008a; 2008b).

Research findings on school counselling service in Slovenia show that it is an important component of every school (see Bezić, 2008; Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020; 2022; Valenčič Zuljan et al., 2011; Vogrinc & Krek, 2012) and that it focuses most of its work on activities of assistance due to the increasing number of identified children and adolescents with learning, educational, personal and social problems. A significant amount of time is devoted to remedial work with children and adolescents, especially their individual treatments when they face learning and educational difficulties or have the status of students with special educational needs (Bezić, 2018; Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020; 2022). Current research carried out in Slovenia and internationally (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2021; Lee, 2020) confirms that this is particularly true in times of emergency, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, when the need for this type of support increases markedly, especially for children and adolescents from vulnerable groups. On the other hand, it has been emphasised for many years (Bezić, 2018; Bezić & Malešević, 2018; Carey et al., 2017; Comparative School Counseling, 2021; Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020; 2022) that the developmental and preventive activities of the counselling service ought to be strengthened significantly. These authors highlight the work of the school counselling service in terms of planning, implementing, and evaluating everyday educational work at schools, as well as planning, creating, and maintaining favourable conditions for a safe and encouraging educational environment that allows individuals optimum progress in all development and learning areas (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020; 2022; Resman et al., 1999; Sink, 2008).

In their work, school counsellors should consider the fact that they are employees of an educational institution which has its own goals, tasks, its own order and sets its own values, rules and norms that derive from *Programme guidelines* (Gregorčič Mrvar & Resman, 2018). Counsellors respond to them, they may accept or reject them, but they nevertheless remain the criteria and guidelines for their decision-making, actions or behaviour, and for their interaction with others. They cannot ignore them. Nonetheless, Slovenian school counselling has avoided excessive institutionalisation. School counselling and counsellors are not as regulated as teachers; they do not have their own timetable, syllabus or curriculum in the same way as teachers do. *Programme guidelines*

(Programske smernice [Programme guidelines], 2008a, 2008b) stipulate that the school counselling service is professionally autonomous. It has a duty to provide sound professional advice at all times, irrespective of the views or expectations of others. When it comes to professional matters, it decides how to work for itself. It has the right and the duty to refuse any task that is contrary to its professional principles or code of ethics. *Programme guidelines* leave it to the individual counsellor to choose their own priorities within the core areas of work and tasks and to design their annual plan of work in accordance with their professional competence.

The "generality" and "openness" of the formal guidelines for the work of the counselling service do not mean that counsellors can leave the activities of the counselling service and the life and work of the school to the unplanned or spontaneous course of events, but rather that they are required to plan their work in an operationally professional manner and, in cooperation with others, to reflect continuously on how to establish and maintain appropriate conditions for a safe and supportive educational environment (see Programske smernice [Programme guidelines], 2008a; 2008b).

Formal educational principles, professional guidelines, and the code of ethics (Etični kodeks svetovalnih delavcev v vzgoji in izobraževanju [Code of ethics for school counsellors], 1998) provide a framework for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the counsellor's work. They define objectives and principles, but do not prescribe in detail what the counsellor should do in each specific situation (Gregorčič Mrvar & Resman, 2018; Resman, 1999). They are not absolute, unambiguous, and immutable instructions to be followed blindly; instead, they are a basis for professional judgement and action, and they prevent unilateral, common-sensical and intuitive behaviour and judgement on the part of the counsellor. The counsellor's decision, work, and conduct should be the result of a professional, moral and formal-legal judgment conditioned by the characteristics of each specific case.

Professional decision-making and action always have personal implications. They are the result of reflection on professional and ethical conduct and a personal and moral assessment of the situation or action. Hare (in Cottone, 2001, p. 43) points out that the intuitive level plays an important role in everyday decision-making, action, and dilemma-solving. At the same time, he points out that intuitiveness alone is not enough, and that it must be subject to critical reflection. If an expert acts only on intuition, without critical thinking or comparison with professional criteria, their decision can quickly turn out to be unprofessional, unethical. This includes the activities and actions of the counsellor that are not reflected upon or directly planned and anticipated. These actions are usually more numerous in the less structured activities provided by counselling services (see Kroflič, 2005). Counsellors' values, beliefs, subjective theories, and prejudices influence their actions and behaviour. All these categories reflect their personal ideologies related to the image of children, political/religious beliefs, views on the functioning of the world, society, human beings, and culturally conditioned ideas. If these categories

are not subject to constant reflection within the framework of professional guidelines and educational objectives and principles, then part of counsellors' activities and practises may be taken over by unconsidered ideas, which make up the hidden curriculum.

This, however, is just one aspect of the hidden curriculum, which appears in many different dimensions, levels, and forms in the school environment. They will be examined in more detail below.

Definitions of the hidden curriculum

The basic definition of the *hidden curriculum*, which we take from the *Encyclopedia of the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education* (Provenzo, 2009), is very loose and based on the understanding of education as a socialising factor and a factor of cultural reproduction. Closely linked to the idea of the hidden curriculum is the concept of the null curriculum, which focuses on what schools do not teach. They both manifest themselves in different ways at schools, representing subtle and deeply pervasive forces in shaping individual attitudes and beliefs. This is a traditionalist (Giroux, 2001) and functionalist understanding of the hidden curriculum (Skelton, 1997), emphasising the role of schools in maintaining social order and stability. Jackson (1968) writes that in this sense, the official curriculum is in contrast with the hidden curriculum, and the school is the vehicle through which students learn the social norms, values, and skills they need to function in, and contribute to, the existing society. The hidden curriculum is manifested primarily through social norms and moral beliefs which are transmitted through socialisation processes and structure social relations in the classroom. The main criticism of this understanding of the hidden curriculum has focused on an overly simplistic understanding of the relationship between school and society and the view of essentially passive learners who are supposedly unable to resist such social reproduction (Lynch, 1989).

Skelton (1997) underlines that the liberal perspective on the hidden curriculum, in contrast to the functionalist one, focuses on the accepted assumptions and practices of school life created by various actors at school, both educators and students, which appear to be taken for granted: routines, school rules, and disciplinary regulations, student-teacher relationships, and the moral educational, and disciplinary practices derived from them. In contrast to the functionalist perspective, which refers to the macro practices of relationships at the school, the micro level of relationships is in the foreground. The main criticism (Giroux, 2001) of this perspective centres on the fact that it can quickly overlook the reproduction of power relations in wider society that occurs in the school space. Some criticism also relates to the overemphasis on the power of the individual over their own life, which is necessarily always embedded in, and consequently dependent on, a wider context.

Thirdly, Skelton (1997) and Giroux (2001) outline the critical or radical perspective of the study of the hidden curriculum. It focuses on how schooling reproduces the social

inequalities that can be perceived through the content of the (un)written curriculum, especially in terms of the reproduction of certain assumptions, usually related to gender and race, that reinforce social inequalities. In his books *Education and Power* (Apple, 1982) and *Ideology and Curriculum* (Apple, 1990), Apple draws attention to the power of cultural reproduction occurring in the education system. The criticism of this perspective, as Skelton (1997) demonstrates, is mainly related to its inaccuracy of the analysis of the content that reproduces and perpetuates social inequalities through the school system.

The weaknesses of each perspective on studying the hidden curriculum can, according to Skelton (1997), be overcome through the postmodern perspective. Some authors (Skelton, 1997; Jančec & Lepičnik-Vodopivec, 2019; Jug Došler, 2021; Kroflič, 2005) draw on Foucault, although Foucault himself was not explicitly concerned with the phenomenon of the hidden curriculum. The plurality and fragmentation of contemporary society, which he highlighted, call into question the many existing conceptions of the hidden curriculum. Skelton (1997) writes that Foucault, like others, would probably question how certain values, attitudes, and norms are recognised as appropriate and by what mechanism people accept them as legitimate. Unlike the representatives of critical pedagogy, Foucault would probably reject the use of totalitarian theories, because social reproduction cannot be limited to the interests of certain groups. Foucault analysed social processes and the individual's involvement in them at some length in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1979). He compared the power of the sovereign state which, through subtle forms of disciplinary power, shapes people's abilities, behaviour, attitudes, and knowledge about themselves to the extent that this knowledge is considered "true". He derived the term "the regime of truth" from this. All this also determines our expertise and influences the formation of our subjective theories, implicit beliefs, and tacit knowledge, which are an important contemporary aspect of the identification of the hidden curriculum (Jug Došler, 2021).

According to Foucault (1979), schools, like some other institutions such as hospitals and the military, organise physical space and time through activities designed to change people's behaviour along certain lines. As some authors (Bida, 2012; Bregar Golobič, 2012; Larcher, 2004) note, this also concerns the power of the material environment. Bida (2012) stresses that the architecture of the school space is not in relation to the hidden curriculum only in so far as it constitutes the material framework of the practices we live, it is not only the material link between the school as an institution and dominant ideological forms, but it can also take on the function of (re-)constructing dominant social ideologies.

The hidden curriculum can therefore be analysed through different dimensions with regard to power relations and the socio-cultural contexts in which we operate (rules, routines, and educational and disciplinary practices, the structure of the material environment), as well as through our expertise that influences the shaping of our individual subjective theories, implicit beliefs, and tacit knowledge. In what follows, we will therefore

be interested in how school counsellors identify and respond to the different dimensions of the hidden curriculum.

Research Problem and Methodological Approach

As school counsellors are relatively autonomous in their decisions, it is important that they critically reflect on their values and subjective beliefs, which as we have shown, have been identified as dimensions of the hidden curriculum. This and other aspects of the hidden curriculum from the perspective of the school counselling service have been insufficiently theoretically and empirically researched both in Slovenia and abroad (e.g., Robinson & Kyle, 1982). Thus, we looked into the following research questions:

- What did school counsellors understand by the term "the hidden curriculum" and how did they define it?
- What concrete examples from their pedagogical practice did they identify as instances of the hidden curriculum?
- How did they respond to the hidden curriculum in their own work and in the work of their colleagues?

As the hidden curriculum is a complex pedagogical phenomenon, it seems reasonable to investigate its occurrence among educators using qualitative methodological approaches (Jug Došler, 2021). One of the major drawbacks of data collected in this way is that it cannot be generalised, but this approach to research nevertheless provides a deeper insight into a particular phenomenon under investigation.

In the academic years 2019–2020 and 2020–2021, we invited students of the 1st year of the MA study programme of Pedagogy at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, to join our research study. Part of the study programme in Pedagogy is an 80-hour internship for students in educational institutions (which can be preschools, primary, or secondary schools). The main purpose of the internship is to introduce students to the activities of the school counselling service. Students are mentored by school counsellors. Slovenian legislation allows for different professional profiles to be employed as counsellors, e.g., pedagogues, psychologists, social workers, special, and rehabilitation pedagogues.

Twenty-five students responded to the invitation to participate in the study in both academic years, 12 in 2019–2020 and 13 in 2020–2021 academic year. Before starting their internship, the students were introduced to the concept of the hidden curriculum in lectures, and in a special session they were also introduced to the method of data collection through interview. As the students had also attended a special course on methodology in the same year, we considered that they had sufficient knowledge to conduct the interview on their own.

The interview consisted of three questions which are presented in this article in the form of research questions. The students were also instructed to obtain the counsellor's

consent to participate in the study and their consent for the interview to be recorded before the interview. After the interview, the students prepared a transcript of the interview and submitted it as an attachment to their Internship Report. These 25 transcripts were the starting point for the analysis presented below.

Both mentors and students agreed that the interview results could be analysed anonymously for research purposes. We did not collect specific data (e.g., type of institution, age of the counsellors, number of years working in education, etc.), as we were mainly interested in their general views. At the same time, the lack of a description of the study units, in addition to the small number of interviews, can be pointed out as the limitations of our study.

The interviews were analysed using open-ended answers categorisation techniques (Vogrinc, 2008). In the first stage of the analysis, we read the content and assigned them initial codes and categories. Complex and differentiated answers were included in several different categories, therefore, the number of answers does not match the number of interviewees; rather, it represents a result of content analysis of the occurrence of a particular idea.

During the second stage of the analysis, the authors of the article met three times to agree on the final analysis and the list of codes and categories. In the third stage of the analysis, we focused on counting the number of statements that we had classified in each category. Due to the small number of the statements, the counting was done manually. When presenting the results, we focused specifically on the content validity of the statements within each category.

Results

The results are presented according to the three research questions we started from. For the first two questions, responses were categorised in a dominantly deductive manner. The categories were identified according to a theoretical understanding of the hidden curriculum, mainly as rules, routines, educational, and disciplinary practices and the structure of the material environment. The (professional) knowledge that influences the shaping of our individual subjective theories, implicit beliefs, and tacit knowledge were identified through the postmodern perspective as presented in theoretical part of the article.

The categories from the answers to the third question were formed inductively. Considering the role of school counsellors in an educational institution in Slovenia (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020; 2022), we expected them to be familiar with the basic principles of how to deal with the phenomenon of hidden curricula, both at the level of the institution, with their colleagues, and in their own work.

Table 1 summarises the main results. These are illustrated with the respondents' statements below.

Table 1

Results – School Counsellors' Understanding and Defining of the Hidden Curriculum, Their Examples of, and Responses to It

Understanding and defining the hidden curriculum	
Categories	**N**
As the unwritten curriculum	15
Subjective theories, implicit beliefs, and tacit knowledge	12
Daily routine	5
Moral educational and disciplinary practice	4
The material environment	1
Misunderstanding of the hidden curriculum	3
Other	3
Examples of the hidden curriculum	
Misunderstanding of the hidden curriculum	11
Subjective theories, implicit beliefs and tacit knowledge	7
Daily routine	7
An undesirable educational phenomenon	5
The material environment	4
Moral educational and disciplinary practice	4
The response of the school counselling service to the hidden curriculum	
The hidden curriculum as an inevitable part of an education institution	14
Strategies to reduce the effects of the hidden curriculum	17
- counselling work with teachers	7
- more complex strategies (discussions, the study of theory, collaboration with external experts)	3
- counselling work with children and adolescents	2
- working on oneself as a school counsellor	2
- general discussion	6
Misunderstanding of the hidden curriculum	5

Understanding and defining the hidden curriculum

First, the school counsellors were asked to explain what they understood by *the hidden curriculum*. The question was: Could you explain what you understand by the hidden curriculum? How would you define it?

All the respondents gave a definition of the hidden curriculum. The largest number, 15, said that the hidden curriculum was the unwritten curriculum. The statements were generally short and unambiguous: *The hidden curriculum is the things that are not defined, but which we do anyway, they aren't written down.*

Twelve statements were categorised as subjective theories, implicit beliefs, and tacit knowledge. The secondary analysis of the statements showed that in this context, most of the counsellors were talking about teachers', educators' beliefs: … *patterns of behaviour, the values, norms that educators (consciously or unconsciously) adopt as their own and pass on to students through their daily actions*. In three of the statements the counsellors highlighted the beliefs that students acquire during their schooling: *It is tacit knowledge that students acquire by observing everyday life at school.*

In five statements, the hidden curriculum was associated with the daily routine: … *The way in which a certain thing is done, or also the way in which the thing that's written down is understood* … Four statements were more complex and represent a kind of departure towards more educationally oriented goals. We have called this category the hidden curriculum as a moral educational and disciplinary practice, and it can be illustrated with the following statement:

> It's an action that's not direct. When you organise a class-management lesson and tell students that if someone offends them, they have to say so, they shouldn't hold it in. You teach what to do in this case. What is hidden in this case is my reaction when someone insults someone. This response of mine, this educational action, how I act when something happens, how I react. You educate in a hidden way.

In one case, the reflection of the hidden curriculum through the material environment was highlighted, and the point was made about the importance of the location of the school counselling service in the school premises:

> A few years ago, we had a room at the school near the main lobby where one of the counsellors was present every day during the main break and after school, to deal with problems. But after a while, we realised that children preferred to go to the administrative part of the building, because there's also a dentist, a sports teachers' office, the counselling service, the secretary's office, and the rest of administration staff. This way, other classmates didn't really know where they were going and students felt safer. That's why that room is now no longer used for counselling, but for socialising. We thought that this would bring us closer to our students, but in practice it didn't work.

Three statements were so vague (e.g., *In fact, the hidden curriculum is always present in the teacher's work*) that we put them in the Other category, and three statements indicated a lack of understanding of the hidden curriculum. To illustrate it, here is an example of such an answer: *I couldn't say I know that someone had a hidden curriculum, that they were doing something systematically, I don't think I've ever heard of that.*

Examples of the hidden curriculum

The second question asked the school counsellors to describe specific examples of the hidden curriculum that they had come across in their practice. The question was: Can you support your explanation with a concrete example from your pedagogical practice?

First, we present a set of statements that indicate a misunderstanding of the hidden curriculum, and then we present examples that reflect an understanding of the hidden curriculum in line with the theoretical concepts discussed above.

Misunderstanding the hidden curriculum

Eleven responses reflected a certain degree of misunderstanding of what the hidden curriculum is. One respondent gave the example of addressing taboo topics at school: *For example, if a teacher knew that there was someone in the class who was gay, and then there was a topic the teacher wouldn't dare talk about because they wouldn't know how to address it in the classroom or how to behave towards that student.* Another mentioned non-verbal communication between teachers and school counsellors: *For example, a meeting of the teachers' assembly where a particular issue is discussed. When I give advice or make a suggestion and then I look at a particular teacher, I know what they're thinking just by their posture. Whether they accept it or whether I'm annoying them.* The third highlighted the guided activity of career guidance:

> I organised an activity day to give students a "sneak peek" into careers in the context of career guidance. We set up a cafe and they were introduced to the professions of an IT specialist, who made the price list on the computer, a waiter, a cook, a cashier, a cleaner, a dishwasher. … This introduced them to the careers available at the schools in the area, where they could continue their education.

One respondent gave the example of students' behaviour. In two cases, the hidden curriculum was said to stem from the school's project activities, but in a few cases the respondents described the enrichment of pedagogical practice rather than the hidden curriculum.

(Theoretically) appropriate examples of the hidden curriculum

The examples that clearly described the hidden curriculum were grouped into the same categories as the answers to the first question. Seven examples related to the daily

routine: *By having a positive attitude and greeting children when they arrive and when they leave, they will learn to say hello when they arrive at the preschool or when someone visits us in the playroom and to say goodbye when they leave.* A further seven statements directly reflected subjective theories, implicit beliefs, and tacit knowledge:

> If I try and mind my own business first – that is, to see what the hidden curriculum is in counselling – I can say that we have to make a very conscious effort to have the same attitude towards all parents. The danger with separated parents is that, because the primary carer has more day-to-day contact with the school and more information, the other parent (either the father or the mother) is easily forgotten and not kept up to date about all important issues.

Five statements reflected an understanding of the hidden curriculum as an undesirable educational phenomenon. This is the example we highlight:

> I see the hidden curriculum in one of the teachers' introducing elements of yoga into her work. She believes that yoga helps students relax in class. That may be true, but is such a practice acceptable in schools? We can't just look at the effects. By doing yoga at school, we present it to students as an activity that we advocate and approve of at school – even though it's not really religiously neutral. We may not pray along with them, but we cannot ignore the fact that this is a religious practice elsewhere in the world, and that our students belong to different religions. Not all of them support yoga. Also, what activities does the school offer? Some schools offer yoga (which is a Hindu practice) as part of their activities, how acceptable is that? Compared to church activities, which are forbidden, why can yoga be allowed? Yoga is to Hindus what prayer is to Christians.

Although the material environment was only mentioned in one answer to the first question, four statements were grouped into this category when analysing the respondents' examples. Here is an instance: *Perhaps at this level, I would highlight the stairs. We have stairs leading to the first floor of the school, but they are for staff only. This "rule" is not written down anywhere, but that's the way it is. And all our students know they can't use these stairs.*

Another four cases concerned the *hidden curriculum* as a moral educational and disciplinary practice. To give an example:

> In the morning circle, when children have the opportunity to talk about their experiences or what they already know about the topic we are discussing, our example (the way we listen to the children, giving equal attention to each child, giving each child a chance, and giving a child who doesn't want to be exposed the opportunity to do so in a positive and appropriate way) encourages children to listen to each other, to participate, and in this way strengthens the cohesion of the group.

The response of the school counselling service to the hidden curriculum

The third question explored strategies for responding to the hidden curriculum by the school counselling service. The question was: How do you respond, or have you responded in the past, to the hidden curriculum in your own work and in the work of your colleagues?

The hidden curriculum as an inevitable part of an education institution

Fourteen statements were grouped in the category "The hidden curriculum as an inevitable part of an education institution". The counsellors stressed the spontaneity, ubiquity, and inevitability of the hidden curriculum: *It's something that will always exist. I think it's spontaneous and it will always be there. You can't say there won't be a hidden curriculum here, there always will be one.* A respondent thought that this wasn't necessarily a bad thing: *There are many such practices. This happens everywhere, including in other schools. Sometimes they might be doing something that's against the rules. But sometimes I don't think it's wrong.*

The counsellors were also aware of the persistence of personal beliefs and attitudes: *Of course, many of them remain unchanged for years (personal beliefs are difficult to change).* Another counsellor related the inevitability of the hidden curriculum to educators' educational and disciplinary work:

> It refers mostly to having peace and quiet in the classroom, to raising hands before speaking, to walking quietly in the corridor; it's not written anywhere in the curriculum, but it still has to be there, because otherwise it would be more difficult to establish order. When I enter the classroom, students' standing up helps them calm down … Once I stood at the door for seven minutes before they calmed down. There are some things that cannot be avoided if you want school to function.

Strategies to reduce the effects of the hidden curriculum

After our initial analysis, 17 statements were identified as strategies to reduce the effects of the hidden curriculum. The school counsellors' answers were supported by more or less concrete ideas. The secondary analysis of the responses was employed to group the proposals into several sub-categories. The largest number, seven, indicates that the counsellors' focus was on working with teachers. To give an example:

> I try to alert teachers to actions that they aren't aware of, that aren't the right thing to do, or that aren't in line with what we're trying to achieve at school. I usually do this by inviting the teacher to my office, because I think it's very important to tell them things like this in private, and certainly not in front of other teachers. In the few years I've been working at this school, I now know what works for whom. … So I usually tell the teacher directly. Of course, in a friendly, non-intrusive and non-humiliating manner.

> Sometimes, however, if I notice that several teachers are acting in a certain way, I bring it to the attention of the head teacher and we discuss it in our meetings. Of course, in a way that is discreet and unobtrusive, so that no teacher feels exposed.

Three statements suggested more complex strategies, involving discussions with the management, discussions in educators' meetings, the study of theory and collaboration with external experts:

> When we notice bigger things, we decide with the management to discuss it at the school's educators' meetings. Either we carry out an analysis, give a theoretical background on something, or we get an external expert, because you and your colleagues can't do everything alone. Sometimes someone else is better at pointing things out. Often the counselling service, the management, and sometimes a teacher comes in and tells us something. But mostly we do the analyses, and every year, at the end of the school year, the management invites everyone to address it.

Two counsellors focused on working with children and adolescents: *When it comes to explaining something to a child, it has to be done, and we can't just stop and walk by as if nothing has happened. Because in this way you reassure the child, you give them clear feedback that they might not get at home… Experts will call it the hidden curriculum, but for me it's what makes school a real-life thing.*

Only two statements focused on working on oneself as a school counsellor:

> It would mean a lot of work on yourself, it would mean supervision, it would mean going to different psychotherapy schools. To process and become aware of certain things in yourself … Counsellors are already dealing with very different issues and we don't have supervision available anywhere and it's just … I won't say the goodwill of the management, but it is a question of financial resources, too. Supervision is extremely expensive.

We identified discussion as the predominant strategy in the six general strategies for reducing the effects of the hidden curriculum. To paraphrase a participating school counsellor: *We discuss these cases with colleagues and look for better solutions, and the state of things is not self-evident. That is to say, we pay attention to such cases and reflect on our procedures to find those that are more appropriate for children's development.*

Five statements, albeit some of them quite lengthy, reflected an inadequate understanding of the notion of the hidden curriculum. For example, one counsellor stressed the importance of planning and evaluating the elements of the hidden curriculum, while the other two implied more attention should be paid to knowledge assessment and conflicts, but also indicated an inadequate understanding of the hidden curriculum.

Discussion

Based on the data presented, we can conclude that the school counsellors in our study were familiar with the basic definitions of the hidden curriculum. According to more than half of the counsellors, it is what happens at the school but is not written down or defined anywhere. Although this is a simple definition, it seems that the school counsellors had at least a general idea of this pedagogical phenomenon. Such understanding is close to traditional and functionalist theoretical definitions of the hidden curriculum as norms, values, and beliefs embedded in, and transmitted to students through the underlying rules that structure the routines and social relationships in school and classroom life (Giroux, 2001; Jackon, 1978; Vallence, 1973). The largest set of the respondents' statements about the hidden curriculum concerned daily routines and different educational and disciplinary practices. This raises the question of whether – when considering the hidden curriculum at the level of educational and disciplinary action – it can also be understood in a positive sense, as some counsellors suggested, in their statements and not only as an undesirable phenomenon. Despite some positive aspects of the hidden curriculum, mainly in terms of ensuring basic discipline in the classroom, learning the basic rules of behaviour, its existence is problematic because it is not simply a vehicle of socialisation but also an agency of social control. The hidden curriculum uncritically perpetuates existing (class) relations in society, as pointed out in particular by critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2001).

The more complex and differentiated descriptions represented the postmodern understanding of the hidden curriculum mainly as subjective theories, implicit beliefs, and tacit knowledge (Apple, 1990; Jančec & Lepičnik-Vodopivec, 2019; Jug Došler, 2021; Kroflič, 2005; Skelton, 1997). The counsellors focused on identifying the hidden curriculum as subjective theories, implicit beliefs, and tacit knowledge in teachers, but only exceptionally in their own work. In the theoretical background we indicated that some counsellors' actions and ideas can also be classified as part of the hidden curriculum if they are not subject to constant reflection as part of professional principles and guidelines, and educational objectives (Gregorčič Mrvar & Resman, 2018; Kroflič, 2005). Based on this, we emphasize the importance of dealing with the hidden curriculum during the initial and continuing education/training of school counsellors and other educators. Jančec and Lepičnik-Vodopivec (2019) have shown that there is a tangible part of the hidden curriculum that can be quantified using standardized questionnaires. The interpretation of the findings can be applied during candidate selection and professional training programmes to help stimulate the acquisition of new knowledge and beliefs, and also to improve educators' daily work as well as their subjective and implicit theories.

A review of the relevant examples of the hidden curriculum identified by the school counsellors in the second question leads to the conclusion that their understanding of the phenomenon is more varied and complex than was suggested by their responses to

the first question. While in the first set of answers it seemed that the school counsellors were familiar with the hidden curriculum, in the second question, when asked to support their understanding of the hidden curriculum with concrete examples from their practice, we found that the share of answers indicating a lack of understanding of the hidden curriculum had increased. The counsellors gave examples of different dimensions of pedagogical work when educators face their own fears and beliefs, when they want to achieve goals indirectly, which are sometimes only loosely related to the goals of the learning process, etc. As we outlined in the first part of this article, the hidden curriculum is not explicitly defined in the context of the school counselling service; rather, it is an aspect of the professional orientation of school counselling. The relatively high proportion of responses indicating a lack of understanding of the dimensions of the hidden curriculum among the school counsellors confirms the need for more research attention to be given to this issue in the future, both in terms of studying the forms and manifestations of the hidden curriculum at the level of the school as a whole and of different educators, as well as in terms of the work of the school counselling service. The existence, analysis, and strategies to reduce the effects of the hidden curriculum should be systematically addressed in both initial and continuing training of professionals. Without adequate knowledge of the phenomenon and without reflection on the actions of practitioners, a range of other factors are strengthened and may have a greater impact than the teaching material and teaching methods set out in the official curriculum.

Moreover, in everyday educational work, school counsellors should prioritize developmental and preventive activities (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020; 2022; Resman et al., 1999; Sink, 2008), which means that their work should focus on planning, implementing and evaluating everyday educational work at schools as well as on planning, creating, and maintaining favourable conditions for a safe and encouraging educational environment that allows individuals optimum progress in all development and learning areas. In other words, the counsellors should strive to focus in their work on the learning environment, primarily on the lessons and what happens in the classroom, including the hidden. In this context, the essential role of school counsellors is to consult other educators in the school, especially teachers, with whom they reflect on the mentioned processes (Robinson & Kyle, 1982). It is a question of subjective theories, implicit beliefs, and tacit knowledge on the one hand, and the interactions between teachers and students, students and the symbolic framework of the school, and the many elements that influence the organisation and implementation of school life on the other hand (Kroflič, 2005).

In the final part of the research, we focused on strategies for responding to the hidden curriculum. Many of the respondents' statements implied the inevitability of the hidden curriculum in school practice. Such an understanding sidesteps the consideration of how to analyse it and minimise its negative effects, which is inappropriate from the point of view of the school counsellor's professional attitude. While we noted in the first part of this paper that counsellors' work is not as tightly regulated as teachers', this professional

autonomy makes it all the more important to analyse with care those aspects of school work that may otherwise be subject to inappropriate, even ideological, action. At the same time, as the work in educational institutions is becoming ever more demanding and complex, it would be advisable to define more comprehensively both the aspects of the occurrence of the hidden curriculum and the strategies to reduce its effects. This attitude is key to the developmental and preventive orientation of the counselling service, which addresses the broader processes and characteristics of the school's order, regime, culture, and climate, and proposes measures to improve or change these processes.

Given the apparent lack of recommendations on how to respond practically to the presence of the hidden curriculum in everyday school life, it is not surprising that the responses of the school counsellors were sketchy. Concrete strategies to reduce the effects of the hidden curriculum focused mainly on working with others, including teachers, children, and adolescents. The two authors who studied the role of the counseling service in the hidden curriculum also emphasize the same points (Robinson & Kyle, 1982). Only rarely, however, did the reflection include, for example, an analysis of, and reflection on, the work of school counsellors themselves. The respondents highlighted communication, which can take the form of individual discussions or consultations between educators, or of a discussion of a specific topic during educators' meetings, possibly with the participation of external experts.

Interpersonal communication is an integral part of the pedagogical process, which can be understood as a way of raising questions about everything that happens at the school and as an unavoidable part of the construction of knowledge and knowing (Apple, 1990). The various aspects of communication are also theoretically the most prominently highlighted among the principles of reducing the effects of the hidden curriculum, which has been the main focus of critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2001; Lynch, 1989; Jančec & Lepičnik-Vodopivec, 2019).

Conclusion

In this article, we present the findings of a study on school counsellors' understanding of the hidden curriculum. Initially, the school counsellors seemed to have a clear idea of what the hidden curriculum was and what its manifestations were. However, a more in-depth analysis of their responses showed that their understanding of the hidden curriculum was often incomplete and inadequate. This was most pronounced when citing concrete examples of the hidden curriculum, but also when identifying adequate strategies for responding to it. The responses that were suitable reflected the prevailing scientific and professional understanding of the hidden curriculum in the Slovenian educational context (subjective and implicit theories and tacit knowledge, routines, moral

educational and disciplinary practices) (Bida, 2012; Bregar Golobič, 2012; Jug Došlar, 2021; Kroflič, 2005).

According to the data obtained, we can conclude that in the future more attention should be paid to the identification and presence of the hidden curriculum, both at schools in general, and in school counselling in particular, and it should be addressed both in initial and continuing training and education for practitioners. Counsellors, in collaboration with other actors at school, play an important role in shaping the work, life, climate and values of the educational institution. It is important for them to plan their work professionally and to reflect continuously, in consultation with others, on how to establish and maintain an appropriate educational climate and the conditions for a safe and supportive environment that enables children/adolescents to make optimum progress in line with their educational goals (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., 2020; 2022). School counsellors are a core group of educators at school who, together with the school management and teachers, can tackle the professional challenges posed by the different dimensions of the hidden curriculum. They can reflect on the potentially negative consequences of this phenomenon and initiate approaches and strategies to deal with it.

Acknowledgements

The article is a product of research programme no. P5-0174 *Pedagogical-andragogical research – Learning and education for quality life in a community*, funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

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Paslėpto ugdymo programa iš Slovėnijos mokyklų konsultantų perspektyvos

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Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje tyrinėjamas fenomenas, kuris švietimo teorijoje paprastai vadinamas paslėpto ugdymo programa, o tiksliau – paslėpto ugdymo programa iš mokyklos konsultantų perspektyvos. Mokyklos konsultantai yra kartu ir mokyklos bendruomenės dalis. Jie sykiu su mokyklos vadovybe ir mokytojais gali spręsti profesinius iššūkius, kylančius dėl įvairių paslėpto ugdymo programos aspektų, apmąstyti galimas neigiamas šio reiškinio pasekmes ir inicijuoti metodus bei strategijas, kaip su tuo kovoti. Kadangi konsultantai, priimdami profesinius sprendimus, yra gana savarankiški, svarbu, kad jie galėtų kritiškai apmąstyti savo vertybes ir

subjektyvius įsitikinimus. Straipsnyje suformuluotais pagrindiniais tyrimo klausimais stengiamasi išsiaiškinti, kaip mokyklų konsultantai supranta terminą „paslėpto ugdymo programa“, kaip jį apibrėžia ir kaip į šį fenomeną reaguoja. Tyrimo duomenys surinkti kokybiniu interviu iš 25 mokyklų konsultantų. Visi interviu analizuojami naudojant atviro tipo atsakymų kategorizavimo metodus. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad mokyklų konsultantai yra susipažinę su pagrindinėmis paslėpto ugdymo programos apibrėžtimis, tačiau išsamesnė analizė atskleidžia nepakankamą jų supratimą. Tyrėjai ir praktikai turėtų skirti daugiau dėmesio paslėpto ugdymo programai tiek pačioje mokykloje, tiek konkrečiai mokyklinio konsultavimo srityje.

Esminiai žodžiai: *mokyklinio konsultavimo paslauga, paslėpto ugdymo programa, mokytojai, subjektyvios ir numanomos teorijos, rutina.*

Gauta 2022 09 21 / Received 21 09 2022
Priimta 2022 12 29 / Accepted 29 12 2022