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MICROPOLITICS AND THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM: IMPLICATIONS TO PEDAGOGICAL LEADERSHIP TO THE 21ST C AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

Education

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ABSTRACT

Whereas there are many determinants of effective teaching and learning such as instructor's efficacy and effective implementation of the formal curriculum, dearth or no literature address effects of other key dimensions of the teaching/learning process such as micropolitics and the hidden curriculum. The situation is more critical at the university level. To foreground implications of micropolitics and the hidden curriculum to pedagogical leadership, following themes are analyzed: Micropolitics and the Hidden Curriculum: An Overview; Micro-politics and the Hidden Curriculum as Embodiments of Educational Institutions, and Implications of Micro-politics and the Hidden Curriculum to Pedagogical Leadership. In light of this, the author advances the argument that key to effective pedagogical leadership is a conscious and deliberate acknowledgment of the two dimensions. Recommendations informing a pedagogical leadership informed by tacit understanding of micropolitics and the hidden curriculum are advanced.

KEYWORDS

Micropolitics, The Hidden Curriculum, Pedagogical Leadership, African Universities

Micro-politics and the Hidden Curriculum: An Overview

Micro politics, the hidden curriculum and pedagogical leadership are concepts not within the "mainstream academic discourses" in institutions of higher learning in Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular. Whereas, there are many determinants of effective teaching and learning such as instructor's efficacy and effective implementation of the formal curriculum, dearth or no literature address effects of other key dimensions of the teaching/learning process such as micro politics and the hidden curriculum that heavily impact on effective pedagogical leadership or the lack of it. More critical is the fact that, even western literature that has made efforts to capture the two dimensions in light of pedagogical leadership, focus has been on basic education or (K-12). Based on studies on the implications of the micro politics and the hidden curriculum in educational institutions, the author advances the argument that key to effective pedagogical leadership should be a conscious and deliberate acknowledgment of the two dimensions. This is hoped to reinforce a pedagogical leadership that is both dialogical and transformative.

Student learning can be positively influenced by policies and practices that affirm student's identities [or the lack of affirmation] (Banks & Banks, 2009). However, as argued by some scholars (Banks & Banks, 2009; Nieto, 2017), for Educational Institutions to be relevant and to meet all the diverse categories of learners as stratified through nationalities, ethnicities, ability/disability, race, social class, gender, and other categories of difference, scholars, policy makers and educational institutions need to put in place deliberate policies, reforms, practices and educational reform debates within the larger sociopolitical, micro political Curriculum contexts.

The 21st C African university's leadership poses myriad challenges some of which can be traced from the Structural Adjustments programs (SAP) introduced in developing countries and Kenya in particular over two decades ago (Rono, 2002), ranging from emphasis on: private ownership/privatization of and in, making education a free and competitive market enterprise, liberalization among others. While the model is "good" in itself, the pertinent question is the extent to which the Education Enterprise which is a multi-dimensional and a multicultural enterprise (Banks & Banks, 2009), and a critical socialization process in life, has the ability and sustenance that would address among other aspects the hidden curriculum and micropolitics.

Literature underscores problems of political instability in the African region and African Universities in particular (Akilagpa Sawyerr, 2004; National Association of State Universities & Land-Grant Colleges, 2008). As pointed out by Akilagpa (2004), development of universities in Africa is a phenomenon of the last half century, established either immediately or before Independence. Since then, number of institutions and enrolments have expanded rapidly across the continent and within the respective countries. Critical challenges have been the decline of state support during the severe economic decline of the 1980s, overcrowding, infrastructure deficiencies, and inadequate access to international knowledge resources among others (Munene, 2015). These problems have serious implications to educational access, equity, quality and relevance. Whereas African universities have been compelled to develop strategies for coping and innovation, the result has been a halt in the decline in many critical areas such as student social support and ensuing micropolitics and the hidden curriculum issues.

As Akilagpa (2008) argued, "accompanying these positive results [in the growth of universities] have been new forms of exclusion as well as a loss of focus on the public purpose of universities as institutions concentrate mainly on increasing institutional incomes and producing graduates for the labor market" (pg.1). Hence, in the wake of university growth and related developments, social support issues, micropolitics and related hidden curriculum issues are barely conceived and definitely not addressed.

Capturing the multicultural aspect, universities globally and Africa in particular, are priding of being Multiculturalism in terms of nationalities, race, ethnicity, gender responsiveness among others. Taking language as an issue globally and in the African University, Hayhoe (1998) noted that language is the window through which we gain entry into meanings, without which, an individual in general and in the learning process in particular becomes an "outsider within". A learner's potential can therefore be highly compromised (Faltis & Hadelson, 1994) as the interactions and knowledges are closed down. Such experiences precipitate to poor academic performance, and other psychosocial problems such as low self-esteem, and low self-concept among others (Sawir, 2005). Such compromised world views and personalities is the complete opposite of what the 21st C university should endeavor to reflect.

Some of the fast growing African economies such as Kenya (UNESCO, 2015), irrespective of her relative peace and development, higher education has been undergoing serious challenges over the last two decades (Munene, 2015). With refugees from neighboring countries such as Somalia, DRC, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Eritrea and South Sudan, the educational sector and Universities have witnessed an influx of learners some of which the main language of instruction is English. Some of these learners who are very gifted, learn to communicate with the language of instruction for the first time- at least formally. Suffice it to say that these are English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This and many other examples call for universities and pedagogical leaders to be cognizant of the hidden curriculum and micropolitics inherent in the systems for all learners to experience a democratic space in the teaching/learning process.

Micropolitics, the Hidden Curriculum as Embodiments of Educational Institutions

As pointed out by Kimber, Millwater and Enrich (2009), understanding micropolitics has become an important part of comprehending leadership and power relations within organizations. As other studies show (Datnow, 1998; Datnow & Morley, 2000; Johnson, 2003, Marsh, 2012) focus has been on understanding micropolitics at the school level and dearth on university settings (Nieto, 2017). Also, much is in the

corporate world and with universities becoming high level corporate organizations, documentary evidence on understanding micropolitics and the hidden curriculum cannot be more topical in the 21st C. This calls for a micropolitical theoretical framework (Datnow 1998 & Morley 2000) aimed at addressing the "hidden serious agendas" that shape the day today running of organizations and professions such as the teaching profession.

Different scholars who have tried to define micropolitics define it as:

The 'organizational underworld' that we know very little about because it is 'almost a taboo subject in "serious" discussions, yet informally it is a favorite theme of organizational gossip as people talk about "playing politics","hidden agendas","organizational mafias", "Machiavellianism" and so forth" (Hoyle 1986 as quoted by Datnow, 1998, p. 20).

The nexus where the formal structure of roles interpenetrates with the informal pattern of influence. It is a skill of judgment and coalition building rather than position. Thus, power is a goal, an outcome, rather than a precondition of political process. It is also a career, a vehicle, a channel. For some, it is a way of life, an end in itself. It is what they do … It is perhaps a macho, masculine, preoccupation, boys' games (Ball 1987, as qtd by Datnow, 1998, p. 20).

Evidently, current literature is about schools. It is therefore critical to understand and be reflective about these concepts in the 21st C university. The 21st C African university is faced with issues that if not acknowledged at the micropolitical and at the hidden curriculum levels can negatively impact on the overall objectives of university education. Such issues are, but not limited to: Understanding and mainstreaming EFL learners, part time program students, abled differently learners, low SES and poor learners, cultural barriers, and integrating information communication and technology (ICT) and especially the part time program learners. Will universities sit back, relax and assume all is well? The underworld must be addressed!

Noteworthy, is the fact that, within the last two decades, the West has radically re-visited curriculum and related debates (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2006); Henderson & Kesson, 1997) with an informed understanding of the concept. Curriculum has been analyzed across the nexus of gender, race, politics, theology, international texts and of course unraveling the broader meaning of the concept. Pinar et al cited (Dreeben, 1976; Apple, 1975a, 1990a; Giroux, 1983c; & McLaren, 1989) who defined "hidden curriculum" as "those unintended but quite real outcomes and features of the schooling process. The 'hidden curriculum' is distinguished from the 'overt curriculum', or the planned curriculum, including objectives" (p. 248). Apple (1979a) as cited by Pinar et al) defined the "hidden curriculum in a way which pointed to the concept of hegemony as he argued:

The hidden curriculum in schools [and universities] serves to reinforce basic rules surrounding the nature of conflict and its uses. It posits a network of assumptions that, when internalized by students, establishes the boundaries of legitimacy…The fact is that these assumptions are obligatory for the students, at no time are the assumptions articulated or questioned (p. 249).

McLaren (1994) defines the "hidden curriculum "as the tacit ways in which knowledge and behavior get constructed, outside the usual course materials and formally scheduled lessons. It is part of the bureaucratic and managerial 'press' of the school – the combined forces by which students are induced to comply with the dominant ideologies and social practices related to authority, behavior and morality" (p. 191).

As is evident in the aforementioned definitions, the hidden curriculum is very "powerful" as it passes on the values, strategies, beliefs, and behaviors that are untaught. As Pinar et al assert, "The silence and marginalization of ideas and voices both in the academic disciplines and in society would become significant ideas in both political and feminist theory a decade later. Within the micropolitics of the 21st C university setting, it is evident that students who have their ideas and habits dominate the curriculum, have an intellectual and social capital that translates into greater academic success. Unfortunately, those marginalized by the curriculum are less successful. As argued in this paper, the hidden curriculum speaks louder when instructors unconsciously give more intellectual attention, praise, and academic help to the "mainstream" learners. Hence, an understanding of what constitutes the hidden curriculum illuminates the fact that more than the overt curriculum, the hidden curriculum is to blame for a majority of institutional failures. It is also evident that the more powerful groups whether due to nationality, language, ability/challenge, gender, race, ethnicity or SES play a crucial role in shaping both the overt and the hidden curriculum and therefore shapes and determines what is valued and devalued. It is therefore critically important to reflect on the hidden curriculum in the wake of the diversity characterizing the 21st C African University.

A snapshot on what the hidden curriculum entails is a reflection on a question I posed to two of my classes following a very highly contested general election in one of the Sub-saharan African country. The question was "what were your experiences during the election week"? I got varied answers but quoting two different ones, one said: "Citizens have matured democratically; while another one said "I better reserve my comments". Both answers were as correct as they can be as truth is in the subject (Creswell, 1998, 2013, Green, Caracelli & Graham, 1999). These two answers gave me a mental jog of some sort and I reflected on the role of an instructor as a leader in a university classroom – in its broadest sense of the word where the dynamics of the hidden Curriculum, micro-politics are at play. In light of this, I contend that key to the effective implementation of the formal curriculum is the deliberate engagement and reflection on micropolitics and the hidden curriculum in the teaching/learning process.

Micro-Politics and the Hidden Curriculum: Implications for University Pedagogical Leadership

A significant finding as pointed in this paper is the glaring omission of the the concepts – Micropolitics and the hidden curriculum in understanding the 21st C university, and specifically the African University. Literature in this paper would be fruitless if isolated from the realities facing the universities and the specifically, the pedagogical leader who sees it all, hears it all and experiences it all. To right the wrong of this glaring omission, pedagogical leaders can adopt several strategies such as: Being cognizant of the hidden curriculum in the teaching/learning process, Peer Observation/collaborative teaching/learning, provision and access of social support services to all learners, and especially the vulnerable ones, encouraging in class peer mentoring programs, institutional and class orientation and mentoring programs, practice ethics of care, practice non-partisan politics in the teaching/learning process, and continued instructor reflection.

CONCLUSION

Effective teaching/learning in the 21st C African university is key to effective university leadership in general and pedagogical leadership in particular. There is therefore the need to enlarge the teaching/ learning space beyond the formal curriculum and be cognizant of the mircopolitics and the hidden curriculum all that largely shape who learners become or fail to become. Hence, pedagogical leadership should be driven by among other aspects: cognizance of the micropolitics, and the hidden curriculum as the latter. Finally, the hidden curriculum speaks louder when instructors unconsciously give more intellectual attention, praise, and academic help to the "mainstream" learners.

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