SEARCHING THE MET HIDDEN CURRICULUM THRU THE ALUMNI'S BELIEFS LEARNED OUTSIDE THE STCW REQUIREMENTS: MAAP-CMU JOINT STUDY

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Abstract This paper is an exploratory study on MET hidden curriculum that made use of the following methods of data collection namely: observation, a questionnaire, structured interview and documentary analysis from internet and library research. The respondents are Alumni and holders of Certificate of Competencies. They are currently employed in either at MAAP or CMU. This study involved an analysis of the various concepts and existing research works on the hidden or covert curriculum. This study was limited to the hidden curriculum which is just one of the eleven types of curriculum (overt/explicit or written, societal, null, phantom, concomitant, rhetorical, curriculum–in-use, received, internal and electronic curriculum). Various theories of the hidden curriculum are investigated, analyzed and interpreted. The MET hidden curriculum as it relates to the alumni seafarers' beliefs they have learned outside the STCW requirements, was examined using some methods of data collection namely documentary analysis, observations, questionnaires, and interviews. Empirical findings were compared to the hidden curriculum theories, and the same were analyzed and explained in detail.

Keywords: Hidden MET curriculum, covert curriculum, alumni beliefs

Introduction

This paper is a joint study made by Maritime Academy of Asia and the Pacific (MAAP) from Philippines and by Constanta Maritime University (CMU) from Romania. The study was

planned when MAAP and CMU, represented by Dr. Angelica M. Baylon and Dr. Cristina Dragomir respectively, had met for the first time at CMU Romania, on May 9-16, 2017. The meeting was due to the kick off meeting for the project "Gender Equality and Cultural Awareness on Maritime Education and Training" or GECAMET, funded by the International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU) and the Nippon Foundation. After several discussions and exchange of issues on MET, they both opined that problems in MET curriculum might have two natures: the "public nature" or the "personal nature." A study on beliefs may be more of a "public nature" that is linked with pressures that people feel about various changes in MET curriculum or policies for the implementation of the curriculum. The school talks a lot about objectives, subjects, timetables, syllabuses, quality standards and technologies. These are all important issues, but they are similar to a donut with icing on top. What ones see or hear or talk about is the "overt" part of a curriculum or the icing above the donut. On the other hand, what one does not see, hear or say, is equally important as well. That refers to the hidden or "covert" curriculum which is like the fillings inside the donut.

The hidden curriculum is made up of the beliefs, attitudes, expectations and motivations of various people - teachers, students and administrators. They are the ones that are mostly unknown, rarely spoken, and very often underestimated. If only they are uncovered, it will provide a lot of insights for the improvement of the MET curriculum. A study on beliefs and attitudes may also be more of a "personal" nature.

Belief may be defined as the feeling that something is true or an idea which is considered correct, but that does not necessarily imply that the idea is right. In other words, the thoughts we hold about language, about teaching and about learning range from conventionally accepted facts to things we receive on a very personal basis. Hidden curriculum refers to messages communicated by the organization and operation of schooling apart from the official or public statements of school mission, policies and subject area curriculum guidelines. The messages of hidden curriculum usually deal with attitudes, values, beliefs, and behavior. There are obvious examples when hidden curriculum has pronounced undesirable effects. An institution with a strong focus on academics may fail to value students who are academically excellent. Honors to deserving students may have been denied for reasons not within the student's control, namely: lack shipboard training days as these depend on the sponsor's schedule of the vessel; mistakes in the computer grading system or wrong judgment of school authorities. This scenario would

demoralize and devalue the student achievers because of the unfairness and injustice experienced. A student's ability to be optimistic, to trust authorities, or to build self-esteem can strongly be affected when his experiences in school are contrary to the school's manual that students are important and well-taken care.

The messages of the hidden curriculum may complement or contradict each other, as well as the official curriculum. Hidden curriculum can support or undermine official curriculum. It is likely that hidden curriculum has the most impact when there is an aggregate or a pattern of consistent messages. When hidden and explicit curricula conflict, it may be that hidden curriculum, as nonverbal communication, that carries more weight. Structural or organizational aspects of hidden curriculum may include: time scheduling of classes and other school activities; facilities provided; materials, such as textbooks and computer software; examinations; required courses; special programs, such as advanced placement; extracurricular activities and services; and grading and grouping policies whereas cultural aspects of hidden curriculum may include school norms or ethos; décor and wall decorations; roles and relationships, including intergroup relations (within and between teachers and students); student cliques, rituals, and celebrations; and teacher expectations of various groups of students (Wren 1999). This paper examines the alumni's beliefs on their learning outside the STCW requirements to uncover the MET hidden curriculum.

Literature Survey

A MET curriculum is an organized framework that guides MET teachers and students in the required education. It is similar to a "contract between society and educational professional about the educational experiences that learners should undergo during a definite phase of their lives" (Braslavsky 1999). Both the school and the community have a say in the development of the written and unwritten or hidden school curriculum. There are differences between written and hidden curriculums. Teachers teach, and students learn implicit concepts and patterns. Some of these are written in the curriculum while others are not. Teachers may not be as aware that they are transmitting unwritten or hidden curriculum ideas. Students may sense it much faster because some of these ideas force them to behave in ways they do not always like. Quickly, they learn that they have to conform to the rules of the school if they want approval.

T. Anderson described three historical ways of viewing an unwritten or hidden curriculum (Anderson 2001). Curriculum sometimes determines limitations to student behavior in the classroom and in the school which may be a hindrance to learning (Marsh 1997). Other notable researchers have studied the hidden curriculum (Longstreet and Shane 1993), the role of the backward design in curriculum establishment (Wiggins and McTighe 2004) and other types of curriculum used in school: societal curriculum (Cortes 1981, p. 240), the null curriculum (Eisner 1994) or the Electronic curriculum(Wilson 2004).

Methodology

There are two ways to explore the beliefs of people - by asking and by observing. By just asking people, or rather, let them talk, give them the time to write or say things, listen to them will provide insights into their thoughts and feelings. Another interesting way of eliciting beliefs is by asking people to complete statements as they wish. The same event can be viewed in entirely different terms by different people holding different sets of beliefs.

This paper presents an exploratory study that made use of the following methods of data collection: observation, a questionnaire, documentary analysis from internet and library research and the structured interview with the 10 MAAP alumni who are currently on vacation and are teaching at MAAP and 10 CMU alumni who are currently employed at CMU. The documentary analysis from the internet and the library analysis contributed to understanding the scientific mainstream on hidden curriculum and in establishing the objectives of the study, the questionnaire, and the interview questions.

The topic guide for the interview was drawn up based on the review of literature and studies and by pilot interviews to four alumni seafarers (two from MAAP and two from CMU). Topics covered included their perceptions about themselves both as former students and as Mariners; their beliefs on what they have learned in the Academy/University outside of the STCW requirements; their sources of learning; the primary way of assessment in their training experience; and the reasons on why they consider their lecturers as role model or not.

The structured interviews were held in May-June 2017. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes-1 hour long. The interview had 19 questions divided into two parts: part A for gathering background information (e.g. nationality, age, sea experience, program/degree etc.) and part B

for collecting more insight (core information). A sample of the core interview questions (part B) can be found in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Sample of questions for structured interview on MET hidden curriculum

PART B. Core Information	
No.	**Question**
1	What is your perception of yourself as a former MET student? Describe yourself in few words.
2	What is your understanding of yourself as a Mariner? Describe yourself in few words.
3	What were your sources of learning as a student?
4	What were your sources of learning as a mariner?
5	Which skills, gained during the educational program, were useful in your current work as Mariner?
6	Did the beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and motivations of the teachers, students, and administrators contribute to your development? If yes, how?
7	What was the primary way of assessment in your training experience?
8	Do you consider your lecturers as a role model? Why?
9	How did your previous education in the Academy/University outside of the STCW requirements help you evolve as a seafarer?
10	How did your previous training in the Academy/University outside of the STCW requirements help you develop as an individual?
19	Did the MET program help you overcome seafarer career challenges? If yes, please give some examples

An interview method was used as it provides: "The opportunity for the researchers to probe deeply to uncover new clues, to open up new dimensions of a problem and to secure vivid, accurate, inclusive accounts that are based on personal experience." (Burgess 1982, p. 107).

The interview was conducted face to face with respondents. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed before analysis. The respondents were aware that their participation is voluntary. All of the interviewees were positive during the interview and felt the importance of the study.

Demographic (Age: Nationality: Sea experience: Last rank: Certificate of Competency, Institutions of training) details of respondents, were collated using a questionnaire and verbatim quotes are also included from the interviews, providing a vivid account of how respondents think, talk and behave. The interview method resulted in a total of 20 interviews composed of 10 Filipinos and 10 Romanians with age range from 32 to 57 years old. They all possess a

Certificate of Competencies, having a rank of an operational level of seafaring experience of at least five years long.

Results and Discussion

1. Personal Perceptions of Respondents as Students and as Mariners

The majority of the respondents perceived themselves both as an excellent mariner and an average student. Just like the Johari window, this is the first way to discover beliefs in oneself and others. The Johari window is a communication model that can be used to improve understanding between individuals (Luft and Ingham 1955), represented in Figure 1.
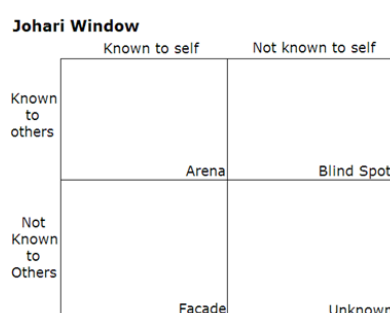
Figure 1. Johari window. Source: Wikipedia.org

However, not all beliefs are available for inspection. There is a secret self, things that a person is aware but do not want to disclose; there is a blind self, things that one is aware but others are not; and also the hidden self, things both the person and others are not aware. So to search into own or other person's belief, one cannot just rely on what a person says or inferences - a person also need to observe to confirm or reject those assumptions. So the second way to explore beliefs is observation and self-observation and, of course, comparison and discussion of what a person observed. By looking at one's actions, at what one does, a lot of things can be inferred, once can go back to his decisions, then to his attitudes, and finally get at his beliefs - and maybe decide to challenge or change them.

2. Learning Outside the STCW Requirements

The study showed that things learned in the formal curriculum often evaporated after the licensure or competency exams and sometimes even earlier.

Regarding the skills which have been useful in their current work as a mariner, the following skills have been cited: theoretical, technical, practical, communication, critical thinking, managerial leadership, human relations and problem-solving. Hence, further study may be conducted to determine the degree of usefulness of each skill as a mariner.

As to the study provisions and study conditions experienced, the following have been cited with both negative and positive feedbacks for improvements: the teaching quality of teachers; the design and structure of the program; the course content of primary subject; the trust and grading system; the length of study in the academy; the contact with fellow students; the chances to participate in research and extension projects; the provision of work placements and other work experience; the opportunities for students to have an impact on the school's policies and overall skills. Hence, further study may be conducted for the respondents to rate their satisfaction as regards their experience.

3. Sources of Learning

The respondents cited the following as their sources of learning namely: fellow students, a special lecturer, some teachers, the actions of the Institution, the inactions of the Institution and experience. It must be noted that majority of the respondents cited actions of the institution which may connote positive or negative. It may pertain to the enacted /endorsed/ratified curriculum or policies approved by the school for implementation by the teachers and officials that have a tremendous effect on students.

4. Assessment forms

The following are the listed primary way of evaluation in their training experience: oral exam, simulator work, written test, class quizzes, class discussions and field trips. Various MET activities of schools may be better funded than others, sending the message that some MET activities are more important, which may create caste or clique structures within schools. Even in the very organization of an academic day, the schedule may say much about hidden curriculum emphasis on particular subjects. The subjects given the most time or scheduled at the most prominent parts of the day could be a means of referencing them, or the topics provided more assessments is more preferred than the others.

5. Lecturers as Role Models

The majorities of the respondents said that their lecturers are their role models and cited the following reasons: "I have learned theoretically and practically"; " I felt that why he says is true and he is doing what he says"; " The lecturer shared experiences on board"; "The teacher used various case studies to exemplify the theory, including his case"; "The professor acknowledged the values system of the student and communicated with the student accordingly".

Three of the respondents had mainly the same beliefs or philosophy: "Yes my lecturers are my role models because there are two kinds of role models - the BAD lecturers and the GOOD lecturers." One alumnus mentioned: "I had enjoyed most the classes when the lecturer was able to identify my interests and system of values and used a collective and appropriate language to keep up my interest to his class subjects." Another one said that: "I can still remember today, after many years, the case studies presented by an excellent lecturer and master mariner, from his experience."

Conclusions

In essence, a hidden curriculum is what the students are taught to exist in the world as a whole. The various beliefs that the alumni seafarers cited as regards on what they have learned outside the STCW requirements include respect for authority; proper behavior in society; how to follow directions; tolerance; and emotional stability. These are components of the hidden curriculum which are based on each teacher, at least to the extent of how the teachers are perceived by their students as role models or not. The hidden curriculum is an extension of the coach.

Whatever the teachers hold in the highest regard is what is transferred to the students. Many of these beliefs and views are universal (such as the respect for authority and proper societal behavior), but some of them seem unique. This could include ideas and views such as: to accept things even if you do not like the idea and to hide ones true thoughts to cite a few. These views were obviously stated by a statement of beliefs made or were stated more subtly through sarcasm and body language, that provided clues to a wide variety of other views and opinions of the students to their teachers who taught them and are therefore part of the hidden curriculum.

The result of this study is not to generalize but rather, this was an exploratory study of an under-researched area of MET hidden curriculum that attempts to explore the beliefs of the alumni seafarers (Filipinos and Romanian combined) which somehow had provided valuable insights.

The alumni seafarers' views are important because they lie at the heart of what people think, feel and do. The more the MET instructors are aware of the student's beliefs, the better they will be able to manage any process of change in the curriculum. MET teachers also need to be aware and do whatever they can to lessen the impact, possibly through oral disclaimers when they venture out about their personal beliefs, and to just simply do their best. This may mean developing multiple teaching strategies and methods based on individual differences for each student in the class. Doing so would mean more work for MET teachers, but it would help keep them and the students on their toes and would reduce the impact of the hidden curriculum upon the other categories of the curriculum.

Acknowledgements

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