



# The Effect of Hidden Curriculum on Character Education Process of Primary School Students\*

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## Abstract

Character education is defined as a planned and systematic approach in terms of self- respect, responsibility and honesty etc. for being a good citizen. The elements of hidden curriculum possessed in schools are values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms and values which are important parts of school function, ceremonies and the quality of interpersonal communication. This research is aimed to determine supportive activities and views of students' participated in these activities with the thought of revealing importance of hidden curriculum on gaining values within character education in elementary schools. Supportive activities of hidden curriculum such as social and cultural activities, free time activities and sportive activities, celebration of special days and weeks, social club works can be considered as strong value gaining tools for elementary school students to comprehend, internalize and perform values. In this study, one of the qualitative research methods case study model is utilized. This research is carried out within 2009-2010 academic year through three elementary schools in Eskişehir affiliated to Ministry of National Education by investigating supportive activities for hidden curriculum and views of students participating in these activities. For analyzing the gathered data, document analysis and content analysis are used. Working group of this study comprises 40 students going to 6th, 7th and 8th grades within three elementary schools in the city center of Eskişehir. At the end of the study, it is determined that values are included in curriculum of elementary schools, and supportive activities for hidden curriculum in the process of gaining and internalizing values have great importance.

## Key Words

Character, Character Education, Value, Value Education, Hidden Curriculum.

The process of acculturation of the child happens at school which actualizes after his nearest environment which can be considered as his home and the social environment that he lives in. By time the character of the child and his moral standing begin to shape according to attitudes and behaviors of the

people within the environment. Schools have very important role for character and moral development of the children who are at school age. School includes all pedagogical, cultural and social factors in character education of the child. In this aspect, the school begins to create the character of the child by functioning the latent power and skills inside him (Başaran, 2005). In order to make a good society the school can be seen as a workshop over the individual. Character comprises the willing of the individual for goodness of other people and moral thought, behaviors for being honest and responsible, personal and affective properties of the one across various circumstances for creating effective approaches, and affective commitment of the individual. Good character helps people to have a democratic life style which includes being equal and respectful to other people and being able to add positive values to the society (Battistich, 2005). Indeed, good character is

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the ability of decision making across life events, careful thinking, selecting true things for application and actualizing these (Lickona, 1992).

### Character Education

Character education is about teaching students how to decide well and how to behave accordingly. Character education improves students' knowledge, skills and abilities through providing them to make a good choice appropriate for having responsibility (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). The purpose of character education is to grow up individuals who are capable of understanding moral values and productive when they are children and using their capacities for doing their best and doing right things, and living with the understanding of purpose of life in their youth (Battistich, 2005).

In the implementations for character education, schools should not only handle one of the dimensions of the character but also should help student to have them to understand these values, accept these values or devote themselves for those values after that behave accordingly in their daily life (Lickona, 1993). Many theorists of developmental psychology have emphasized that students develop codes of moral values in school years, and their characters are formed in these years (O'Sullivan, 2004 cited in Karatay, 2011).

When a good character education is achieved at schools, every character property that should be taught is very important for proving appropriate classroom environment and activities. This situation makes it necessary to define character which includes thoughts, feelings and transforming into behavior. In addition to that, students need opportunities that they can develop and practice each of their property. In order to do this, the school personnel should adopt themselves to character education studies, be a good character model with their own lives, and be responsible for these studies (Benninga, 1991; Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 1997). Character education is the oldest aim of schools (Ryan, 1993). Character education is to develop the knowledge, skills and abilities that provide students to make reasonable choices. Also, students should carry the responsibility of these choices (Ryan & Bohlin, 1999 cited in Ekşi, 2003).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, negative social events occur which stem from the crises of values and cultural degeneration in all over the world. The so-called phenomenon of globalization removes the boundaries considering the dominant cultures as ruling at

anytime and anywhere, sensitivities of society and values are defuncting and disappearing day by day. Increased new growing trends of violence between generations are dishonesty, being rebellious against parents and teachers, violating social rules, substance abuse, suicide and other self-injurious behaviors. This is an important task and the responsibility for schools in dealing with these negative situations. Because schools are beyond being the places of education is a social environment for students. At this point, students' societal values from the past to today can be transferred through training and events.

Character can be just built by values. The definition of good character is the answer to the question which values are needed to be taught. People who are humble, honest, kind, loyal, patient and responsible are classified as people with good character by others. Ryan and Bohlin (1999) state that character education should be placed not only in just one lesson, but also in the whole school life. They emphasize that schools should be transformed into a virtuous society for the characteristics such as responsibility, working hard, honesty and honor.

Lickona (1992) states that character education is a necessity for every democratic and free society. According to him, not only schools but also societies have the responsibility for education. This responsibility requires two basic values to be taught effectively in schools. One of them is respect requiring people, other living beings and natural environment to be thought valuable; the other one is responsibility requiring thinking about behaviors, accepting their consequences and achieving the task. According to him, these two basic values are necessary for all social structures from schools to state.

### Classification of Character Education Program

Character education programs can be classified according to schools of thought and adopted development objectives that are important for them as follows (Thomas, 1991 cited in Ekşi, 2003):

*Judgment and Habit:* Some approaches emphasize person's moral judgment and thinking while the other ones focus on the implementation of virtuous behavior until it becomes a habit.

*"High" Values - "Intermediate" Values:* Some approaches give priority to the fundamental values such as self-discipline, courage, loyalty and perseverance while the others give importance to the means values such as care, kindness and friendship.

*Focusing on individual- Focusing on environment and society:* While determining different perspectives about character education, following questions are asked: "Is character for only the individual or fitted into norms and frameworks of the group?"

Character can be just built by values. The characteristics of the person who is prominent among people, admired and respected are always the same. The definition of good character is the answer to the question which values are needed to be taught. People who are humble, honest, kind, loyal, patient and responsible are classified as people of good character by others (Kelley, 2003 cited in Akbaş, 2008).

Some of the messages gained in the school by the students are not included in the official curriculum. These messages are important parts of hidden curriculum. In fact, hidden curriculum has great influence on what kind of experiences can a student get, how can the student can move and how can a student understand himself and develop his personal perspective towards world.

Hidden curriculum covers the organization atmosphere which is formed by the interaction of both symbolic and social of school culture (Wren, 1999).

### **Hidden Curriculum**

The most important social institution that provides educational opportunities for individuals are the schools. One of the indispensable elements of education which are schools, numerous surveys are conducted to make schools more productive and efficient, and the scientific framework for the development of the schools try to use all the possibilities. The training program in an educational institution, children, adolescents and adults provided by the national education and covers all the activities towards the realization of the objectives of the institution (Varış, 1996). According to Demirel (2007), educational program organized within the framework of a particular program and a plan emerges through including the experiences of students. These definitions are especially for objectives, content, teaching-learning process and evaluation activities that are clearly written for the official program. Schools are responsible for individuals' academic, social and emotional development. Therefore, for the educational schools it is really hard to serve and develop the individual as a member of the community within the framework of the official program. Many effects which cannot be seen clearly, severely affects the quality of education is available in the open program as well as in the educational environment of the program.

Not being settled into the scientific basis, curriculum development studies in education reflect the selection of content and make it subjective by doing curriculum is important. On the other hand, teachers can be subjective in practice about which courses and subjects are important. So the teacher gives a secret message to the students whether the subjects are important or not.

Today, it is considered that the social development of students are important as well as cognitive development and proving social development they give importance to a second curriculum, including social and cultural features of school, rather than formal curriculum. Except from the curriculum which is written at school, this curriculum is referred to as a second curriculum and referred to names such as "the hidden curriculum", "secret curriculum", "stored curriculum " or "non-written curriculum ", but it does not provide a clear and distinctive elements of the official curriculum for students, such as feelings, values, attitudes and habits of the official curriculum of the correct knowledge is stated to be more effective (Yüksel, 2004). Hidden curriculum is defined by various authors in different ways. The common points of these definitions are that hidden curriculum is apart from the objectives and activities in official program, not explicitly defined, unwritten and a curriculum of emerging information, ideas and practices arising during the process of learning and teaching (Gordon, 1982; Jackson, 1968; Martin, 1976; Snyder, 1971 cited in Yüksel, 2007). In fact, hidden curriculum emphasizes the point that can be seen in a way that the students desire to gain, not explicitly mentioned in the official curriculum, written and unwritten, and to learn the information through real experiences, ideas and values.

This curriculum whose principles, practices and purposes are not written explicitly makes up the school's physical conditions, psychological environment, administrators and teachers' non-written or non-stability attitudes and behaviors. According to Jackson, hidden curriculum which makes students more adapted to real life in the classroom is a curriculum making students as a social individual (Jackson, 1990). According to Lynch (1989), hidden curriculum provides schools to meet the social requirements. Portelli classifies the definitions of hidden curriculum under the four groups (cited in Yüksel, 2004) as follows (i) non-official and not clearly specified messages but students are expected to access them; (ii) unintended learning outcomes; (iii) hidden messages emerged due to the structure of the education system; (iv) activities put forth by the student.

Hidden curriculum indicates that teachers and administrators' behaviors, conversations and approaches for students, cooperative and competitive education, quality of school climate, research or memorization of teaching process, teaching staff's values, learning environment created by the school, in short, students' attitudes and behaviors of interactions in the school. According to Tezcan (2003), hidden curriculum has many factors which make up school's socio-cultural frame. Many factors such as behaviors of teachers and administrators, attitudes, approaches, beliefs, values, quality of the school's atmosphere, values, interaction pattern providing students with non-written rules in school-environment, routines, discipline, obedience to authority constitute this social frame. There is a hidden curriculum in all schools or education institutions no matter what level of organizational function and the quality of education provided. According to Yüksel (2002), classroom climate, school-environment interaction, administrative and organizational arrangements in school make up implicit program scope, outside the official program students acquire information from three sources. School rules, school building architecture and decoration, reward and punishment methods, extracurricular activities, clubs are included in school's organizational arrangements. School's providing students with the desired social norms and values, continuing social order for the dominant ideology of in the country and textbooks for the ideology of country and power implicitly are included in school-environment interaction. The actions taken in the classroom, the teacher's expectations of students, determined class rules inside the classroom, teaching styles of teachers, teachers and students' opinion and ideas about each other are the factors for making up the class climate. As Sarı (2007) expresses, it is difficult for educational institutions having good citizen responsibility with the responsibilities only under hidden curriculum circumstances because many of them within hidden curriculum is not much than conveying information. According to Doğanay (2009), schools implementing education program are means of socialization and this happens as explicit objective, implicit and hidden. Therefore, hidden curriculum that is implied as components of official curriculum is as important as these of hidden curriculum.

In contrast to being read at the lesson book or being discussed at the classroom, hidden curriculum consists of real-life experiences. All students ought to internalize a curriculum -hidden curriculum- which consists of specific social norms to continue

as effective and productive citizens firstly at school and then in a larger society.

With the help of meetings, clothing arrangements, monitoring students and all other cultural properties, hidden curriculum includes everything for training students indirectly. Components of hidden curriculum are attribution of values, beliefs, attitudes that individuals have at the school, norms and rules that are important parts of school functioning, ceremony and ritual and interpersonal communication. Positive school experiences draw attention for educationalists and researchers. An education program ought to demonstrate all aspects of people's thoughts, feelings, beliefs and doings.

Yüksel (2005) states that students are exposed to many values through both formal and hidden curriculum in school, but hidden curriculum is more efficient in teaching values. Moroz and Reynolds (2000) emphasized that teaching values at the school is something that is done all the time. Teaching values at school has an impact on the program, considering some of the subjects less/more important and the interactions between teacher-student.

## Method

### Purpose of the Research

Purpose of this research is to investigate the function of hidden curriculum at the process of having values within the context of character education in elementary school curriculum thoroughly. Within the framework of this general purpose, try to answer the following questions:

- What are the supportive activities in the process of implementation of curriculum in elementary schools?
- What are the views of the students participating in these supportive activities in schools?

### Research Model

In this research, case study model is used which is one of the qualitative research methods. Qualitative research designs investigate current case study of a phenomenon under actual depth, in a holistic approach. The case study, one of the qualitative research designs, is to research a current phenomenon deeply under the actual circumstances in a holistic way (Yin, 2003).

### Working Group

Working group of the study consists of 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade elementary school students from different three elementary schools in Eskişehir province and the total is 40 students. While determining the working group, “criterion sampling” method included and purposeful sampling methods is used. While determining the working group, ‘maximum variation sampling method’ within purposive sampling is used. Purpose of this research is not generalizing to the findings to the universe by means of providing variety, but to find out what kind of common points and similarities among different situations.

### Data Collection and Analysis

This research is conducted within the framework of activities of three elementary schools affiliated to Ministry of Education in the province of Eskişehir in 2009-2010 academic year. In this research, document analysis and content analysis techniques are used for data analysis. First, the document analysis is made. The document review activities are the form of elementary school institution plans for social and cultural events, leisure time activities, sports activity plans, celebrating specific days and weeks.

As a second stage in the research, ‘content analysis’ evaluated within the paradigm of qualitative research is used to put forth thoughts and feelings of students participating in the social and cultural activities, leisure time and sporting activities, celebration of specific days and weeks, social club activities. An interview form prepared by researcher is used as a data collecting instrument in order to reach this aim. Content analysis is defined as a systematic, repeatable technique based on certain rules and some of the words of a text encodings with smaller content categories (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2008).

For reliability of the study, interview transcripts are given a specialist from the field. Then markings of the researcher and the specialist are compared. While comparing, markings of “agreements” and “disagreements” are used by controlling answer option to the related question and related sub-theme. In reliability computation, Formula developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) is used.

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Number of Agreements}}{\text{Total number of agreements} + \text{disagreements}}$$

Reliability average of interview coding key about elementary school students’ views concerning the supportive activities for hidden curriculum is found as %92.

### Results

In this research, supportive activities for hidden curriculum in the implementation process of the elementary programs and views of students participating in these events are examined.

In terms of supportive activities for hidden curriculum in the process of elementary program, five main headings are constructed as a result of the study findings. As regards social and cultural activities performed in elementary schools, it can be concluded that hidden curriculum supports the implementation process of the programs directly and indirectly. These activities enable students to enhance communication between students and have important roles in actualizing the purposes of education. For three elementary schools in Eskişehir province which is affiliated to the Ministry of Education, hidden curriculum plans are prepared by the institution. A total of 20 social and cultural events within the scope of the research of are organized by the school and other institutions. Behaviors targeted by social and cultural activities that are given to students are determined within the framework of overall objectives of the Turkish National Education. Through determined activities, students grow up being loyal to Atatürk’s principles and revolutions, as expressed at the beginning of the constitution as citizens to the nationalism of Atatürk, is aimed to contribute to their ability to gain by developing the necessary hardware. Social activities having academic, practical and vital value provide a natural environment and working opportunity that is linked with education system with the principle of learning by doing and experiencing (Canbay, 2007).

As regards leisure time activities performed at schools, it can be said that within the scope of elementary schools, findings are organized a total of 6 free-time activity. In fact, free-time activities at schools are necessary to achieve the objectives of education, develop students in terms of socially, gaining of social status, fusing of cultures with each other through cross-cultural transfer (Yavaş Karataş, 2006). According to Sarı (2007), the research conducted by the students participating in social activities revealed that discipline problem potential is lower in students participating in social

activities compared to students who are not interested in social activities.

Sartori (2007) finds that the students participating in social activities more than one feel themselves belong to school anymore and thus they have a higher perception of the quality of school (cited in Inal, 2009).

In his study about Boarding Primary Regional School, Halıcı (2005) cites that if students spend their free time efficiently, they consume their energy in a right way, so they feel themselves belong to school much more and through this disciplinary problems in the school will decrease.

Affective dimension of human is consisted of such elements; emotions, preferences, pleasures, affections, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, feelings of appreciation, values, moral ethics and so on (Bacanlı, 1999).

In terms of sportive activities performed in schools, the study covers a total of 8 sportive events in elementary schools that are organized by the school and other institutions. Experiences of different friends within a group, children help them to develop new behavior patterns. Interaction with a group of friends provides the students learning of social behavior which is not seen in the family. By this way, children learn to abide the norms of the group and behave appropriately according to his/her role in the group (Fidan & Erdem, 1992 cited in Çağdaş & Seçer, 2002).

As regards celebrating special days and weeks, it is concluded that 30 specific days and weeks are celebrated in schools in academic year of 2009-2010. In addition, related regulations about certain days and weeks are determined in elementary schools. According to Wynne (1991), ceremonies held at the school have great importance on students to acquire new values or consolidate the values that they already have had (cited in Sari, 2007). Activities such as school ceremonies which are called as ritual are frequently held. Rituals (customs), are ritual actions to strengthen the cultural patterns and values (Terzi, 2000).

In terms of social clubs, a total of 11 club activities are given place in elementary schools. It can be thought as a reality that elementary school students gain democratic awareness and recognize the organization of non-governmental institutions. Studies strongly suggest that the role of teachers on teaching values effectively is important. It is emphasized that teachers should need to be models reflecting values truly, create moral class environments, use different strategies formally within the

class, and perform various applications informally outside the class in order to gain values.

Studies strongly suggest that teachers have roles in effective teaching of values. It is strongly emphasized that teachers should be role models reflecting correct values in both inside and outside the school environment, create moral classroom environment, take out a variety of applications as formal in the classroom and as informal outside the classroom for students using different strategies (Yıldırım, 2009).

Paykoç (1995) defines hidden program as school life and environment outside the programs, decisions, principles that are applied consciously and explicitly in schools. Hidden program covers everything such as teacher and student attitudes, daily functioning, extracurricular activities and so on expect the official school program. Actually, hidden curriculum in the school reveals itself clearly in the studies where students are away from the adults' control, interact with their peers in a relatively more secure environment and their relationships are under their own control.

As regards views of students participating supportive activities for hidden curriculum, individual and social gains from the hidden curriculum is utilized. Specifically, from the views of students participating in activities supporting the hidden curriculum prepared by three elementary schools affiliated to Ministry of National Education, two themes have been reached which are individual benefits and social gains. In terms of individual benefits, students are emphasized that they gained individual cleanliness, loving and keeping animals, hardworking, responsibility and respect for nature while in terms of social gains it is concluded that students gained respect, equality, helping, trust and honesty.

Students' personal hygiene, liking and protecting the animals, diligence, responsibility, respecting for nature are acquired by students as the individual gains within the concept of activities supporting hidden program. On the other side, the values, as a measure of good and bad behaviors in social life, are the main determinants of many issues such as behaviors, decisions, group relations, human relations, organizational behavior, upper-lower relationships and so on. Moreover, respect, fairness, cooperation, reliability, honesty are acquired by students as social gains within the concept of activities supporting the hidden program.

### Discussion

This research is made to make clear the importance of hidden curriculum to have values within the context of character education, to identify the activities implementing implicit program in the process of implementation of curriculum in school and students' feelings and thoughts participating in these supportive activities in schools. Such supportive hidden curriculum activities as social and cultural activities, leisure time and sportive activities, celebration of specific days and weeks, social clubs can be seen as tools in terms of value creation for elementary school students to recognize, internalize and implement values. Supportive hidden curriculum activities which are mentioned in the scope of this research have undeniable importance for having fundamental values in elementary school curriculum. In general meaning, character education is to give basic human values to new generation, create sensitivity to these values and help them to transform these values in behavior (Ekşi, 2003). Values indicate situations that are desired or not desired, requests and preferences by defining what individuals see important (Erdem, 2003). Values which help us to find out what we are going to and not going to choose, prioritize actions and events are categories like ideas, thoughts and feelings. Internalizing values is a symbol for development of the individual's character. Values are the main determinants for measuring of good and evil behavior, decisions, group relations, human relations, organizational behavior, upper-lower relationships and so many other issues. Elementary school curriculum includes values. There is an effect of supportive hidden curriculum activities in the process of acquisition and internalization of values. These activities should be planned in a conscious, organized and useful way. Activities learning by doing and valuable for life should be determined and regulated in accordance with education principles. Hidden curriculum conveys messages to students that institutional and social relations in the community are natural, neutral, legitimate and fair. Hidden curriculum provides students with daily experiences of their personal and social learning. This event comprises all school and has a tremendous impact on students' behavior and learning. The school's structure and functioning of the program related to the hidden messages are transmitted (Arthur, 2003). Yüksel (2005) states that the values of the program in many schools are taught thorough both public and hidden curriculum but the values hidden in teaching is more effective for students. According to Kohlberg (1983),

placing moral education in the courses within the program is not effective. Students are often more influenced by moral environment and atmosphere created by hidden program in the school rather than textbooks and instructional materials (cited in Yüksel, 2005).

Hidden messages which are included in supportive hidden curriculum activities at hidden curriculum are transmitted from application processes, institutional and social backgrounds affecting the behavior of administrators and teachers, textbooks and materials used in classes and etc. Atmosphere created by the culture and climate of the school is not only provide students positive social experiences but also affects students in terms of obligations and pressures arising from the school atmosphere and non-democratic function of school; even it is possible to educate students as being passive, timid or aggressive individuals. Lavoie (2006) states that the hidden curriculum has a significant effect on behavior of students, progress, productivity and performance in a constructive way as well as its destruction for itself. Different social, cultural and educational experiences in school provide student to develop different relationships to authority, business process, physical and symbolic capital (Türedi, 2008). Social and cultural activities, leisure time and sports activities, ceremonies for the celebration of specific days and weeks, social clubs are important tools for hidden curriculum in schools and they are considered as successful to extent linking formal and informal aspects of the school and lasting learning experiences can be created. Values in the society focusing on raising good citizens should play a role in bringing the schools to be more effective. Social events, lectures at the school except in accordance with the objectives of education, according to students' interests and needs, personalities, information, and improve school management under the guidance of the teacher in a planned, scheduled, regular work is defined (Binbaşıoğlu, 2000).

Social and cultural activities, leisure time and sportive activities, celebration of special days and weeks through celebrations, social club studies are important tools for hidden curriculum in elementary schools and to what extent they combine students' interests and needs, create definite learning experiences can be considered as achievement. Such events and activities in schools shouldn't be forgotten as an important tool for character education studies. If the schools perform an effective character education study, it is important

to prepare suitable class environment and conducting the activities that reveal each of the character traits. Within the context of hidden curriculum, it is suggested that elements like social class of the students that they come from and their academic achievement levels, social and academic life in schools, interactions between school and the environment, management and organizational preparations of the school, position of the teacher and the students in classroom and school environment should be properly taken into account during the process of character education.

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