

# The importance of hidden curriculum in educational activities from the perspective of youth home educators

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## **Abstract**

The paper presents selected results of an empirical investigation, the main aim of which was to find out the opinions and practical experiences of educators of school accommodation facilities in educational activities in the field of work with hidden curriculum. The empirical investigation was carried out using a qualitative strategy, using the method of semi-structured interviews with 20 educators. The results of the investigation yielded the definition of the basic areas of hidden curriculum in educational activities from the educator's perspective. These are the relationships at different levels, the material facilities related to different subjects and also the overall climate of the facility. The different areas interact and lead to the improvement or deterioration of educational activities. Practical examples used by the educators to promote relationships in the educational group became a partial result.

**Keywords:** hidden curriculum, youth home, climate, relationships

# Význam skrytého kurikula ve vzdělávací činnosti z pohledu vychovatelů domova mládeže

## Abstrakt

Príspevok prezentuje vybrané výsledky empirického šetření, jehož hlavním cílem bylo zjistit názory a praktické zkušenosti vychovatelů školských ubytovacích zařízení při výchovně vzdělávací činnosti v oblasti práce se skrytým kurikulem. Empirické šetření bylo realizováno pomocí kvalitativní strategie, metodou polostrukturovaných rozhovorů s 20 vychovateli. Výsledky šetření přinesly vymezení základních oblastí skrytého kurikula ve výchovně vzdělávací činnosti z pohledu vychovatele. Jsou jimi vztahy na různé úrovni, materiální vybavení vztahující se k různým subjektům a také celkové klima zařízení. Jednotlivé oblasti se ovlivňují a vedou ke zlepšení nebo zhoršení výchovně vzdělávací činnosti. Dílčím výsledkem se staly praktické příklady využívané vychovateli k podpoře vztahů ve výchovné skupině.

**Klíčová slova:** skryté kurikulum, domov mládeže, klima, vztahy.

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## Introduction

The issue of youth homes stands at the margins of professional discourse. School facilities of the youth homes type are specific institutions that are found in a similar regime as in the Czech Republic only in Slovakia. Educational activities take place in these institutions with individuals who are in a more complex period of adolescence, when they are searching for themselves. The hidden curriculum is also not often addressed and its definition is not uniform. The name itself can be misleading and it is necessary to understand what is behind the term.

## 1 Theoretical background

The concept of hidden curriculum is understood in different ways. Jackson (1968) argues that in schools, the hidden curriculum is that which is important, that which is not part of the formal curriculum, and that which is not given much attention. Bergenhenegouwen (1987) defines the hidden curriculum as anything that is not part of the formal curriculum. Jirasek (2009) is inclined to define the hidden curriculum as the culture of the school. He gives the school environment as an example. Kraus

(2001) divides the environment into two components. The first component is the material, natural component. This is the equipment, the scenery. The second component is characterized by the people in the environment, their relationships, age and other determinants. Carillo (in Lorenz, 2015) defines the characteristics of the hidden curriculum. He speaks of secrecy, where the influence is not apparent at first glance. He also mentions the constant influence of the hidden curriculum in different forms and shapes. He also states that the acquisition of the hidden curriculum is mainly through routine repetition of activities. Mareš, Rybářová (2003, 103–108) refer to the results of the research conducted by Vallence, Snyder and Ahola related to the hidden curriculum, who defined the results as follows.

- As attitudes towards authority, learning associated with values, socialization political and cultural (Vallence).
- As a way of acting and behaving in activities related to the activities of the educator (Snyder).
- As the ability to learn to learn, to master professional, personal competencies (Ahola).

The empirical investigation presented in this paper is based on one part of Andersen's notion of the hidden curriculum (in Mareš, Rybářová, 2003), which defines the hidden curriculum in three levels:

1. As a concept associated with the covert manipulation of individuals through schooling.
2. As a concept linked to material and social conditions.
3. As a concept leading to the socialization of the individual.

The empirical investigation focuses on the second definition, which is related to the connection of the hidden curriculum with material and social conditions as well as the environment. The environment that surrounds us can help us in our educational action, it can limit us, or it can be a neutral territory. The environment of school accommodation must be seen as one of the most important factors influencing educational action in youth hostels and boarding schools. According to the above definition, it consists not only of the furnishings of the rooms, but equally of the relationships between the residents, the relationships with the teachers, and the relationships between the establishment and the legal guardians. In 2015, the Czech School Inspectorate issued a thematic report on youth homes, in which it defines three basic areas of youth home activity. The first area is preparation for classes, the second is leisure opportunities and the last area is related to the prevention of risky behaviour. The report focuses on listing the forms and methods used in these areas.

## 2 Empirical investigation

The main aim of the empirical investigation was to find out the opinions and practical experiences of school accommodation educators in educational activities in the field of work with hidden curriculum. To achieve this, three sub-research objectives were set.

- Sub-objective One: To explore the possibilities of working with relationships from the educators' perspectives.
- Second sub-objective: To identify areas important for educational work in terms of material equipment.
- Third sub-objective: To find out the views and practical experiences of educators in creating a positive climate in the facility.

Main research question: What views and practical experiences do educators have with the hidden curriculum in educational activities?

Partial Research Questions (PRQ):

- PRQ1: In what areas do relationships influence the educator's educational activities?
- PRQ2: Which areas of material equipment influence the educator's educational activities?
- PRQ3: What experiences do educators have in creating a positive facility climate?

The investigation was conducted using a qualitative strategy. Semi-structured interviews became the method of data collection. The interviews were chosen because of the deeper insight into the issue at hand, the possibility of clarifying any ambiguities on the part of the researcher and the respondent, and the possibility of observing non-verbal reactions.

Data collection was conducted by transcribing the interviews verbatim into text form. Coding was chosen as the method of analysis. The transcribed text was segmented into units and each unit was subsequently assigned a code. Categories and subcategories were created using annotation and relationship search. Axial coding was then used. This paper presents sample results from three domains that include multiple categories and subcategories. These are the relationship domain, the physical facilities domain, and the overall facility climate domain. The research sample was 20 educators with balanced representation.

*Table 1*  
Characteristics of respondents

Age	20–30	30–45	45 and over
Number of respondents	7	7	6
Gender	Male	Female	Other
Number of respondents	10	10	0
Experience	Up to 5 years	10–15years	More than 15 let
Number of respondents	8	6	6
The Youht Home	Separate device	Attached device	Other
Number of respondents	8	12	0

## 3 Results

### 3.1 Area of relations

The selected respondents agree on the importance of good relationships in educational activities. 15 educators emphasize the appropriate attitude of the educator towards the pupil. They perceive the creation of a feeling of trust, safety and security as important. 5 educators put the personality of the educator as a formal authority in the foreground and consequently the subsequent relationships with pupils on clearly defined rules. 7 educators also perceive good relationships between educators with each other as important. The most central area in relationships mentioned by all educators is peer relationships or relationships in the room. As examples of strengthening peer relationships, educators mentioned the possibility of choosing a roommate, placing students with the same study orientation in rooms, age-related. Inappropriate factors related to accommodation are mentioned by 13 respondents with odd numbers of residents per room. To strengthen the relationships at the level of educational groups or the relationship between educator and pupil, adaptation stays (3 respondents), regular informal meetings (5 educators), weekend stays and offers of extracurricular activities (12 educators) are used. In order to strengthen the relationship between educator and pupil, the majority (15 respondents) choose daily informal contact with the pupil and observation. 6 educators report that they have a prevention programme for the school year in the youth home for the educational group and each year one part of the programme focuses on relationships, communication, problem solving and other social skills. Among the factors that influence the formation of a good relationship, all respondents mention the way of communication. They include the way they address the pupil, the choice of words, the pitch and tone of voice, the use of non-verbal com-

munication and the choice of the environment in which the communication takes place. Another factor is related to the personality of the educator. 15 respondents ranked empathy as the most important quality of an educator. Other strong qualities associated with creating good relationships were listed by respondents as being open, readable, able to engage and motivate. Three respondents also ranked a sense of humour as an essential quality of an educator.

### **3.2 Material equipment**

The area of material equipment has been classified into several categories and sub-categories. All respondents perceived the room facilities as central towards the pupils, which they also linked to relationships with regard to the number of roommates. 18 respondents mentioned the location of the workplace for each pupil as crucial. 10 respondents stated that they like it if pupils decorate their environment, e.g. pictures, posters. 6 respondents commented on this option that pupils are not allowed to decorate their room in a similar way. 3 respondents perceived a change in the pupil's relationship with the youth home when they brought something from home, e.g. a cushion and decorated their room with pictures, flowers. The change was manifested by the pupil's involvement in the youth home's events, in leisure activities. Another area of material equipment was focused on the whole youth home. 16 respondents mentioned the possibility of toilet facilities in the rooms for a smaller number of pupils as a positive. 12 educators commented on the possibilities of material equipment for leisure activities. To purchase new equipment, 10 respondents use the possibility of participating in grant calls. 12 educators stated that the retrofitting of the facilities is mainly realized through additional activities, when different groups are accommodated in the youth home during the weekend. However, half of the educators immediately added that the accommodation events are not popular among the pupils. All respondents also rated their facilities in youth hostels. Here the respondents were split in two halves in perceiving the possibility of having their own tutor room or sharing a room with another tutor. Respondents cited opportunities to consult another perspective as positives of shared space. On the positive side, respondents saw the separate tutoring room as an opportunity to talk individually with students about personal problems.

### **3.3 Environmental equipment**

The last area focuses on the climate of the entire facility. Differences between respondents were partly related to whether the facility was a stand-alone facility or one attached to a school. Respondents from stand-alone youth homes felt they were complicit in creating a good climate for the entire institution. In contrast, respondents from affiliated homes tended to perceive their position as inferior. Two respondents said that

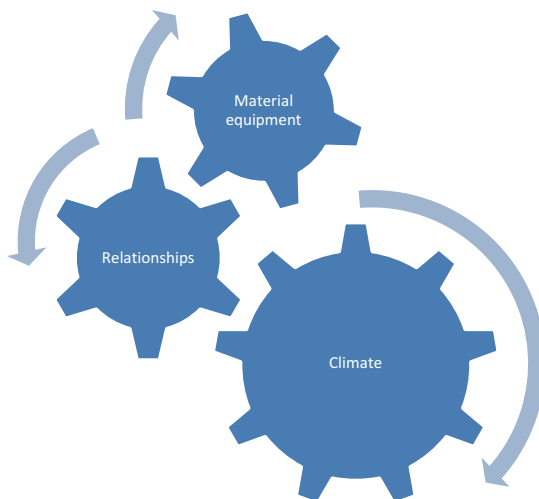
they mainly make sure that students leave for school on time, clean their room, come to the youth home on time, and follow the house rules. As far as communication with supervisors is concerned, according to the respondents, it mostly takes place only in the level of communication with the direct supervisor, which is usually the head teacher, the tutor. 12 respondents mentioned informal meetings before Christmas, on Teachers' Day, at the end of the school year as examples of mutual communication with supervisors. Among the factors that influence the climate of the facility, 5 respondents included the entrance to the youth home and the decoration of common areas. Another eight respondents highlighted workplace relationships. Respondents mentioned team-building activities or joint training as strengthening good relations. 4 educators rated financial rewards as a factor in a good climate, which "can help the educator be happy and transfer their mood to others." On the other hand, 12 educators perceived that feeling happy affects the scheduling of work hours, which are mostly in the afternoon. One respondent stated that he felt that he "has no personal life." Another area focused on the climate of the facility centred on the youth's knowledge of the home's concept and direction. 17 caregivers reported that there is not much change. Everything works according to the set and experienced rules. 3 educators said that the management tries to incorporate current trends in the educational field and also in the prevention of risky behaviour. Evaluation as a tool for further development of the institution was mentioned by 11 educators. 5 of them said that evaluation is carried out regularly and involves the perspective of educators, legal representatives and the pupils themselves. The remaining 6 mentioned that evaluation takes place rather irregularly with a varying representation of respondents. Sometimes the survey focuses on the guardians, sometimes on the pupils. 9 educators did not talk about evaluation, but about regular evaluation from the educators' point of view, evaluating not only their activities, but also their cooperation with legal representatives and work with pupils.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to present selected results of an empirical investigation that focused on the views and practical experiences of educators in youth homes. The results are presented in three areas, namely relationships, material facilities and perceptions of the climate of the facility. The results show the interrelatedness of the different areas. A favourable facility climate is set to build a suitable environment and facilities for pupils and educators. Appropriate material facilities in the rooms are closely related to the pupils' feelings and good material facilities in the education rooms, for organising leisure activities, are related to the educator's satisfaction. Relationships set on mutual respect, trust between the educator and the pupil, educators among

themselves, educators and the management and guardians influence the favourable climate of the facility.

Figure 1  
*Interconnection (own processing)*



The importance of continuous work on these areas emerged from the respondents' statements outside of connectivity. In the area of relationships, adaptation stays for new pupils, regular and occasional extracurricular activities, and the activities of the educator with the educational group in preventive activities aimed at developing communicative, social and personal competences are offered as inspirational. Relationships between educators should be supplemented by informal meetings, joint training and team-building activities, according to the respondents' experience. In the area of physical facilities, the most important areas are the creation of a suitable 'home' environment for pupils and good facilities for the educator's activities in the area of facilities for educational activities and in the area for leisure activities. The climate of the whole youth home is perceived as a calling card. Respondents mentioned, among others, the arrangement of the premises, the whole building, the entrance to the facility. Some also mentioned the organisation's website and the possibility for prospective residents to visit during an open day.



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