The Analysis of Teachers’ Discourse Power in Classroom Society Under the New Curriculum Background

Jian-min Zhou

Abstract

In the traditional discourse location of classroom society, it seems that teachers have the dominating discourse power. However, it is the teachers’ discourse power apparently given by authority that conceals the loss of that of their own. In the education world, the very fact is that teachers have lost their discourse power. Under the background of New Curriculum Reform, the return of teachers’ discourse power is necessary. The dialogue between teacher and curriculum version and that between teachers and other education researchers should be realized. The form of the ability to use discourse power depends on the improvement of their own and the reform of the outside teaching institution.

Keywords: Teachers’ Discourse Power; Fictitious authority; Individual discourse power; Dialogue

1. Introduction

Discourse is also called speech, the interaction conducted by means of speech-language. Martin Heidegger once said, “Language is the Homeland of Being.” From the angle of sociology, a classroom is a society in essence, the social place where teachers and students encounter various of events, dominant or recessive. It is the place where teachers and students exchange ideas with the help of discourse. Discourse has the dominant position in classroom society. As a media of classroom social interaction, discourse is by no means neutral, and on the very contrary, it has social nature and contains kinds of power and authority.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Views of Teachers’ Discourse

Speech conducts according to certain discourse rules, which is called language game by Wittgenstein. “But the rules are not legalized but it is the contract existing between teachers and students, explicit or implicit.”[1] It is the “implicit” rules that dominate the discourse field of classroom society. Michel Foucault, a famous French thinker, notes that discourse is not simple language or text but the structure of statements, terms and categories, historically, socially and systematically. “Discourse is a relationship of power. It means who has the right to state. Some people have to keep silent (at least on some occasion), or their statements are considered not worthy of being given attention. Discourse system is restricted in the emotional

1Bohai University Teaching and Research Institute of Foreign Languages, Liaoning China 121000
and thinking aspects. Even though it is a system concealed and apparently uncontrolled by people, it is a really existing power.”\cite{2} The power exists in system, knowledge and reason, which is called discourse power by Foucault. There is an invisibly deterrent force, which forced you to be subjected to it.

Teaching discourse is a special discourse existing in classroom society with classroom power resource being the core part. Thus, whoever dominates the power who forms the discourse authority accordingly. It is worthwhile to note that the “authority” mentioned here is not “power”. According to Webber, a German social scientists, power means ability that enables a person to make his own will come true over others’ hindrance, no matter what the power is based on. While authority means the possibility that the order with certain contents will be carried out, based on legislation.

2.2 The Essence of Teachers’ Discourse Power

From the analysis above, it is can be seen that authority means the possibility of forcing others to obey, conferred by legal top-down relationship, which is associated with social status and roles. In the analysis of traditional classroom discourse, it is only the teachers who occupy the authority position and control the discourse field of classroom. In the classroom discourse field, teachers’ discourse power is also called speech rights, which exert great impact on students in education. It expresses the status of teachers in classroom. In the traditional discourse field, teachers are given authority, which is legitimized according to systematical procedure. The students are disadvantaged groups and lose their rights to say in the discourse field. Most critics against the traditional teachers’ discourse is limited within their speech authority, but once the appearance of the so-called authority is uncovered, it can be found that teachers say things they don’t mean and the subjectivity crisis as educational practitioners is also reflected.

3. Teachers’ discourse power in traditional classroom discourse field

3.1 Teachers’ discourse in traditional classroom society—Fictitious authority

The common dialogue unit in classroom consists of inductions dominated by teachers, responses from students and evaluation by teachers—IRE structure. In the analysis teaching and learning procedure by theory of “language game”, A.A. Bellack notes that the simple structure is the most common form. H. Mehan, who applied methodology of ethnology to the analysis of classroom discourse, confirms that this structure is the most frequent recycling one in classroom discourse.\cite{3} IRE dialogue structure distinguishes from our daily binary units with returns and ends with teachers’ evaluation of teacher-student dialogue in classroom. Apparently, in this structure, the role of teachers is decisive. The equal human relationship is explored by the teachers’ evaluation, which does not reflect the teachers’ power itself as an educational subjectivity. However, it only scratches the surface of problem if we stay at the level of the critics against teachers’ absolute authority just from the aspect of the dialogue structure. In class, a teacher more often uses the word “teacher” rather than “I” on behalf of himself or herself. Therefore, teachers themselves are isolated from the class and for students and it indicates that teaching is neutral and none business of teachers in value aspects.
The loss of a teacher’s first person makes the knowledge and discourse non-subjectivation, builds the systematical human relationship, and therefore results in the loss of teachers’ subjectivity. The essence of teachers’ educational practice is to duplicate the “legal knowledge” for students by means of the dialogue structure. In the classroom society, teachers finish teaching without the existing of “I”. From the analysis, it is obvious that teachers’ status is of superficial authority and teachers become the representatives of society. As the subjects of the classroom, the rights given to teachers are the products of the social system and the educational system, which makes the rights legal and teachers become the representatives of “Legal Knowledge”. The educational system gives teachers the rights to convert social entities into students’ ideology and personality and also transform social rules into students’ inner rules. The values outside are transformed into students’ personality and further form their outlooks on life and behavior habits.

On the one hand, educational system gives teachers requirements and on the other hand, those rights are converted to teachers’ systematical power. Although besides the legal discourse regulated by systems, there is also discourse related to teachers themselves, the so-called personal discourse is too little to mention.

3.2 The loss of teachers’ personal discourse—no dialogue with teaching text

In the traditional classroom of modern curriculum outlook, the knowledge is regarded neutral and objective. Curriculum is the knowledge implanted or collaborated with students by teachers and it is the reflection of social ideology. From the angle of educational sociology, school curriculum carries the mainstream of ideology of the whole country and embodies nation’s will-power and values. With the status of the absolute authority given by the system, teachers carry out the “curriculum practice procedure,” during which the curriculum is necessarily reconstructed by teachers.

Bernstein, in his social theory of language code, notes that the language utilized daily by people is a kind of culture code which indicates cultural characteristics of the speaker. It is apparent that students with different cultural levels are familiar to different levels of language code. Teachers need to reconstruct and re-interpret teaching texts and make them acceptable for those students who have different cultural levels from them.

However, the reconstruction is not the involvement and the embodiment of educational subjects, teachers themselves. During the process, not absolutely controlled by compulsive demands from social authority and state’s mainstream ideology. At least, in teachers’ field of vision, they are guided by them during the process and teachers’ subjectivity is lost. Teachers are placed in the objective position and the discourse power of their own is restrained and deprived. Teachers are reduced into an employers, not creative, but loudspeakers with the mission to implant certain ideology. However, teachers, as the social identity, should have the discourse power of their own. Without teachers voice, the classroom would become silent without creativity.
4. Return of teachers’ individual power under the background of curriculum reform

4.1. Realization of dialogue with curriculum texts

The should-be state of relationship between teachers and texts is “dialogue”. In Martin Buber’s dialogue theory, relationship is the ontology. It is in the field of relationship, human being exist as real human beings but are not fossilized by concepts. He holds that there are two ways for individual to interact with existing things, which can be expressed by two original words “I to It” and “I to You”. In “I to It” relationship, “it” (object) is just the thing utilized by “Me” (subject) to recognize something. The relationship is not mingled but opposite, in which “I” cannot find one’s own sense of values but “I to You” relationship is the real basic relationship of human beings. When “I” meet “you”, with my whole being, I get close to you, and you are not my things to experience or explore.[5] The equal relationship of “I to You” between teachers and texts means equal dialogue with mutual understanding, which is not equal to subjects’ understanding of objects.

Contemporary famous philosopher Gadamer explained in his *Truth and Method*, understanding is not one-way projection from subjects to objects but a “dialogue” with broader meanings. He notes subject not only refers to the persons to understand the object but also refers to the object itself. It is the mutual understanding between two subjects. Gadamer thinks that those texts seemingly not possible to debate with “me” also create interacting effects. Basically, understanding all things including nature should be implemented by the way of interpenetrating and inter-mingling. The dialogue style of teacher-text relationship can find its evidence in interpretation of textualism. Thus, it is obvious that, dialogue with texts is an indispensable factor for the subjectivity of teachers. Only if there is the embodiment of the teachers’ existence of being “I” and teachers’ spiritual freedom can the curriculum be refreshed. Teachers should breakthrough the existing thinking habits, not limited by reference books but try to understanding the teaching texts and gradually form their curriculum philosophy and ideology.

4.2 Realization of dialogues with other educational researchers

Unique “practical knowledge” is constructed by teachers in practical teaching.” Even though a teacher’s practical knowledge, complete with other theory knowledge of other educational researchers, due to the fact that it depends on limited experience, lacks strictness and universality, it is lively and concrete, functional and flexible. The exchange between educational researchers contributes to the mingling of practical and theoretical knowledge. The built platforms help practical teachers and theory researchers work together by listening to each other, and thus make the identity “I” for teachers come true. With the return of discourse power, teachers are expected to have the consciousness to involve in the construction, reflect in the mingling process and promote independence and growth. At the same time, it is not realistic for the educational world only to have authority discourse by bureaucracy and reasonable discourse by educationists. Discourse from teachers should be attached enough attention to.
5. Demand for teachers to form the ability to make dialogues

For quite a long time, due to the limit of planned economic system and curriculum management, coupled with teacher training pattern, teachers are accustomed to the state of being “insincere carrier” in curriculum implementation without adequate creativity and involvement, thus lacking discourse power in terms of teaching philosophy and ability, which are urgent to cultivate.

5.1. Transform curriculum philosophy, confirm curriculum ideology

Curriculum ideology is a basic and professional ideology, which belongs to the social ideology field. If teachers enter the curriculum world, curriculum philosophy is indispensable. Thus it is possible for them to design the curriculum and transform the static curriculum into active and lively one. Reasonable curriculum ideology plays an important role in teachers’ ideology and educational behavior, which is the curriculum philosophy and methodology. It is the basic for forming independent involvement and research of the curriculum. Only by this way, dialogue with texts and other curriculum researchers and developers can be realized.

Under the background of elementary educational reform, with curriculum philosophy being the core of educational philosophy, it becomes a significant mission for teachers to enter the new world of curriculum. Teachers are expected to transcend the narrow-minded curriculum philosophy, confirm mingled curriculum philosophy, productive curriculum philosophy and practical philosophy, and thus comprehensively grasp curriculum values and objectives and guide their teaching behavior with new curriculum philosophy.

5.2. Rebuild school curriculum system

Teachers’ discourse needs to be protected by system. If it is restricted by system unreasonably, it cannot help form teachers’ dialogue ability. “If people’s spirit is restricted, everything is silent and reducing...People would see the great pyramid standing silently on the barren ground and controlling the silent desert.” “If authority hinders in the aspects of thoughts and spiritual activity, the whole world would live dependent on the past wealth without renovation...the values would not be healthy anymore, the knowledge would not be accurate anymore, scientific development would not be active anymore...,” which is advised by a French thinker in Napoleonic epoch. Thus, the existing curriculum system should be given more renovation, carrying more freedom to teacher. The transformation of the existing curriculum culture including teaching system and routines should put into great consideration.

6. Conclusion

In the traditional discourse location of classroom society, it seems that teachers have the dominating discourse power. However, it is the teachers’ discourse power apparently given by authority that conceals the loss of that of their own. In the education world, the very fact is that teachers have lost their discourse power. Under the background of New Curriculum Reform, the return of teachers’ discourse power is necessary. Thus, the existing curriculum system should be given more renovation, carrying more freedom to teacher. The transformation of the existing curriculum culture including teaching system and routines should put into great consideration.
References


