

Teachers' Teaching Communicative Rationality: Connotation, Mechanisms and Strategies

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Abstract

It is a universal phenomenon that there has been lack of communicative rationality in teachers' classroom teaching communication. The essence of teaching communicative rationality is regularity, purposiveness and normativity. Besides those, the formation of teaching communicative rationality is restricted by the thinking mode, experience, habits, commonsense, sensibilities and other passive cultural factors of instrumental rationalism, as well as the dehumanized classroom communicative norms and the teaching behavioral patterns of giving and accepting. The generating mechanisms of teachers' teaching communicative rationality are as follows. The core factor is reflective communication practice. The intrinsic power is the communication motivation of self-fulfillment. The rational use of languages comes to the necessary condition. The essential guarantee is the humanized communication norm. In view of what has been mentioned above, it is necessary to take measures to promote teachers' communicative rationality from four aspects: reconstructing the value rationality of teaching communication, re-understanding the meaning of teaching communication, initiatively promoting the individual construction and consciously reflecting the practice of inner communication.

Keywords: Teachers, Teaching communicative rationality, Mechanisms, Strategies

1. Introduction

Classroom teaching, in the sociological sense, is a special practice activity of communication between teachers and students with curriculum as the intermediary. Communication is not only the basic condition for the realization of effective teaching, but also the important mechanism of students' development in the environment of classroom teaching. Moreover, teachers' teaching communicative rationality is the key factor that influences the effectiveness of classroom teaching and status of students' development. However, it is a universal phenomenon in practice that there has been lack of rationality in teachers' teaching communication, the centralized reflection of which is that most teachers recur to their experience, habits, commonsense, sensibilities and other non-rational factors in teaching communication. Then what is the implication of teachers' teaching communicative rationality? What are the underlying causes that why teachers are lack of teaching communicative rationality? How does the teachers' teaching communication rationality take shape? How should the teachers promote their teaching communicative rationality in practice? This paper will mainly analyze these issues mentioned above.

2. The connotation and characteristics of teachers' teaching communicative rationality

Communication, as the practice form of classroom teaching, refers to an activity of cooperation, dialogue and exchanging ideas which goes on between teachers and students with curriculum as the intermediary. From the perspective of epistemology and the theory of humanity, rationality is a kind of capability and natural instinct of human beings. To be more specific, rationality, at first, is a specific essential power and the subjective capability of being humans. Moreover, it is not only the inherent quality and requirements of human beings, but also the peculiar value criterion and evaluation standard of human being. (Jurgen Habermas, 1989) In this sense, rationality refers to a cognitive capability that people can outguess the essence of state of affairs and make pointed judgments and decisions. What teachers' rationality means in the teaching communication is that

teachers are not content with “what”, but rather with the conscious attitude of “why” and “how” towards the communication with students. Furthermore, regularity, purposiveness and normativity are the basic connotation and inner standard of teachers’ teaching communicative rationality. Therefore, teachers’ teaching communicative rationality means teacher’s capability of cooperating, making dialogues and exchanging ideas with students regularly, purposively, normatively during particular teaching activities condition which is under the prerequisite of specific situation by a sense of language symbols with curriculum as the intermediary.

Specifically, the regularity of teachers’ teaching communication refers that teachers can grasp and follow the laws of students’ learning, students’ development and classroom teaching, as well as can make conscious choice and do rational reflection on processes and results of teaching communication activities, which mainly manifests the authenticity, accuracy, acceptability, understandability and communicativeness of teaching communication. The purposiveness of teachers’ communicative rationality means that teachers, at first, should be aware that human being is the purpose and can achieve real communication, mutual understanding and non-compulsory intersubjective consensus with students through cooperating, exchanging ideas and making dialogues. The fundamental purpose of which is to boost all-round development of students’ unrestricted personality. The normativity of teachers’ teaching communicative rationality implies that teachers can make proper choice of communication methods to construct communication relation in accordance with the specific social requirements and role formalization of teachers and students, and its essence is to deal with the relation between role differentiation and role integration during the process of teaching communication, and its effort is to foster students’ social adaptability.

According to cognition and communication level of teachers’ communication, teaching communication can be divided into three stages: emotional level, intellectual level and rational level. The emotional level implies that teachers’ primary cognition is superficial, vague and unfounded, to teaching communication. The intellectual level refers teachers’ preliminary cognitive capability to preliminary control the characteristics, meanings and laws of teaching communication. The rational level means that teachers can discern the nature and significance of teaching communication and can also have the cognitive ability to make proper judgments and decisions in the practice of teaching communication. On the emotional level of teaching communication, most of the teachers seldom have their own opinion about the perspective, width and depth of teaching communication, but simply follow the herd. On the intellectual level of teaching communication, the teachers have the ability of comparing, summarizing and preliminarily abstracting plenty of teaching communication practice and can gradually clarify its essence and meaning themselves, but they cannot resolve other people’s confusion. On the rational level of teaching communication, the teachers can master the essential relation of teaching communication and make rational decisions and take conscious actions based on the specific situation of teaching activities, which concentrated reflects the regularity, purposiveness and normativity of teaching communication.

3. The phenomena and the formative factor of lack of teachers’ teaching communicative rationality

It is absolutely true that the concepts and behaviors in primary and secondary classroom teaching have been profoundly changed by introducing the category of communication. With the concepts of communication continuously transferring into concrete practice, however, there has been lack of rationality in teachers’ teaching communication. The non-rational phenomena mainly exist the following four aspects.

3.1 The dissimilation of communication relation

Communication is the basic characteristic and inner condition of teaching. It is also the basic need for students as human beings. Moreover, it is the significant mechanism to guarantee realization of students’ development in the environment of classroom teaching. As being lack of profound understanding about the deeper meaning of communication, its significant function for students’ development and its dynamic generating process, the teachers are used to regarding themselves as the subjects in teaching communication while the students are passive objects. It results in dissimilation from intersubjective relationship to subject-object objective relationship. Naturally, the teachers lead the students to play the presupposed roles and seldom consider the students’ needs and desire for communication. Thus, the teachers, as the authorities, instill knowledge into students’ mind, while so that the students can be only passive to adopt it piously.

3.2 One-sided communication mode

Due to the expansion of teaching objects and increasing teaching efficiency, teacher is more concerned with communication with groups of students than with the other communication modes, such as individual teacher with individuals student, individual student with individual student, students group with students group, individual student with students group, and individual student with himself/herself. Obviously, this kind of communication mode restricts development of students groups and individuals’ diverse development. What’s

more, the communication between teachers and students are limited in oriented asking and answering question. The cognitive communication takes up the central position of the whole communication process, while the emotional communication and volitional communication between teachers and students are marginalized, so both teachers and students are difficult to be engaged in the communication including integral cognition, emotion, volition and personality.

3.3 The concentration of discourse power

A large number of teachers, in the teaching communication practice, regard themselves as the legal “authority” or “chief”. They always show a prurient interest in imparting knowledge, teaching, disabusing students’ questions. The teachers fully process the rights of freedom, choice and decision in teaching communication, while the students can hardly gain the opportunity to make comments. Students can only listen to the teachers and passively accept their inculcation. As a result, the students of subject spirit have to act as objects in communication. The subject-subject communication is dissimilated into subject-object instillation. Both teachers and students are stripped of individuals’ value, needs and emotional experience. And only can be abstract roles and means of carrying out tasks. The interpersonal communication relationship is alienated to that between objects. Teaching communication imbrutes a kind of communication without person.

3.4 Passive communication emotion

For the reason that there are numerous differences between teachers and students in thoughts, knowledge, experiences, emotion, attitude and needs, the teachers always take teaching communication as the tools to transfer knowledge to students, and regard communication as the platform of teachers’ transference knowledge and students’ accepting knowledge. This kind of communication dominating by instrumental rationalism causes the teachers lacking of driving force to communicate. It is worse that teachers may be of impulsive, utilitarian and passive communication emotion, so that neglect students’ communication on psychology seriously. In other words, the teachers often pay more attention to the students who are more active and show-off than those quiet ones whose individual feelings and emotions are ignored.

4. The causes of lack of teachers’ teaching communicative rationality

Teaching communication which is lack of ration, not only impedes professional development and individual-self development of teachers, but also restricts students’ initiative exploration of the deeper meaning of knowledge, the sincere innermost communication between teachers and students, and students’ development of cognition, sociality and personality. Then, what are the reasons causing the lack of teachers’ teaching communication rationality? Totally, there are four factors.

4.1 The thinking mode of instrumental rationalism

In the domination of the thinking mode of instrumental rationalism, classroom teaching in current primary and secondary schools in China is hard to fundamentally cast away the barrier of “examination-oriented education”. The school administration and the teachers still regard the effectiveness of the teaching results as the criterion to evaluate all the teaching activities. This kind of thinking mode and its intrinsic value criterion make the interpersonal teaching communication descend to tools and means. The teachers absolutely become the subjects of communication while the students inevitably are reduced to the objects of communication. In this sort of one sided subject-object thinking mode and behavior, teaching communication activities are merely the means for students to master knowledge efficiently so as to reach the teaching goals. Teaching communication, involuntarily, presents more instrumental rationality and less value rationality.

4.2 The traditional passive cultural psychology

By the passive effects of the traditional Chinese culture, many teachers still hold the obsolete concept that teacher is the absolute authority. The authoritative teachers and the obedient students appear during the communication process, which dissimilates the teaching communication to an instrumental objective activity. Besides that, the traditional deep-rooted passive Chinese culture shape the teachers’ behavior mode basing on experience, habitude, commonsense, convention, sensibilities. Teaching is gradually lack of rational spirit, and teachers’ basic behavioral modes are the simple imitation of experience and merely training of imparting knowledge. Thus, the teaching communication neglects of human spiritual enrichment and enhancement of life value as a result of lacking rational spirit in teaching communication.

4.3 The excessively strengthened system rationality

In reality, the classroom teaching reigns over fully cumbersome, rigid and unified regulations. To be more specific, almost all the class arrangements are under the tight control of regulations, such as the classroom

routine, asking questions, seat arrangements, etc. It not only obstructs teachers' teaching communication to form the humanistic, rational and democratic operation mechanism, but also imposes restrictions on students' consciousness of participation and creative capability. The excessively strengthened system rationality suggests and consolidates the authority of teachers' status in teaching communication, as well as dominates students' thinking mode, learning style and developing approach, making students become insignificant and lose individual personality.

4.4 The teaching behavioral patterns of giving and accepting

People simply consider teaching as a special cognitive process within the framework of philosophy epistemology since a long time ago. That is to say, they neglect the cognition of characteristics of teaching communication and cultural attributes, which forms the teaching patterns of giving and accepting. This sort of teaching pattern allows the teachers not to consider the students' personal feelings in the process of communication and neglects their needs and capabilities of communication. What they do is to impose their own viewpoints on students, so the relationship between the teachers and students has become an "I—it" relation of unequal control and obedience. Teachers' self-centered orientation and authoritative complex can restrict students' thoughts and constrain their development, making teachers lack rational cognition of teaching communication, only concentrate on imparting knowledge to students, and ignore the mental communication between teachers and students.

5. The generative mechanisms of teachers' teaching communicative rationality

As what has been mentioned above, the generation of teachers' communicative rationality depends on the following factors. (1) to breakthrough the thinking mode of instrumental rationalism and the orientation of teaching value that the aim is not simply to pursue the effectiveness of teaching communication result but to focus on the rationality of teaching communication process and the timeliness of teaching communication. (2) to convert the repetitive communication practice basing on experience, habits, commonsense and emotion to creative communication practice on the basis of rational cognition and scientific knowledge, basing on humans' subjectival consciousness and creative consciousness; to convert "control-submission" to democratic equality; to convert conservation and closeness to cooperation and openness. (3) to remove the dehumanized systematic factors from existing classroom teaching communication and fully respect students' subjective consciousness, participative consciousness and creative thinking; to take students' comprehensive development of their unrestricted personality as the purpose of teaching communication activity and the criterion of classroom teaching convention. (4) to exceed the limitations of teaching epistemology; to profoundly understand the communicative features and cultural attributes of teaching activities; to give full play to the function of teaching communication on development of students' sociality, humanity and personality. Hereby, the thesis puts forward the generating mechanisms of teachers' teaching communicate rationality from the perspective of teachers themselves,

5.1 The reflective communication practice is the core factor

Teachers are good at reflecting and criticizing about their own teaching communication practice, which is the core factor of the generation of teaching communicative rationality. The teachers, since a long time ago, have been used to doing simple repetitive imitations by virtue of experience, commonsense and emotions, and gradually forfeit the reflection and critical capability to the processes and results of their own teaching activities, which brings about many irrational phenomena and problems in teachers' teaching communication. In other words, the ultimate formation of teachers' teaching communicative rationality requires the teachers to develop a sense of questions, reflective consciousness and critical awareness. The teachers should not only thoroughly understand the teaching meaning of communication and the essential function of communication to students' development, but also constantly examine the rationality of their own communication process and the effectiveness of their communication results. Last but not least, the teachers ought to enhance their cognitive capability in communication and teaching communication capability on the basis of much teaching communication practice.

5.2 The communication motivation of self-fulfillment is the intrinsic power

The teachers' communication motivation is the intrinsic power to drive the teachers to communicate with students in classroom teaching. It is also the main psychological impetus to push forward the processes and the completion of teaching communication activities. Furthermore, it is also an internal stimulus to affect behaviors, as well as a kind of the inner energy and impulse. The fundamental factor of teachers' communication motivation is an inner driving force to communicate with students. (Karl Jaspers, 1991) This sort of inner drive can distinguish surface layer from deep layer. The inner drive on surface layer just takes the teaching communication as a mean to obtain the effectiveness of results, while the inner drive on deep layer is a need to realize self-value

and enhance the teachers' teaching levels. Therefore, the generation of teachers' teaching communicative rationality requires a communication motivation to fulfill itself. The communication drive manifests individual teacher's inner demands, such as requirements, emotion, motivation, pursuit, etc. It impels the teachers to participate in the teaching communication activities, taking their self-development and teaching requirements as the starting point, which becomes the internal motivation for the generation of teachers' teaching communicative rationality.

5.3 The rational use of languages is the necessary condition

Language is not only the basic tool of communication, but also the existence mode of communication. It was Jaspers who advanced that people should be required to rely on the heritage of the language to achieve themselves, due to the fact that spiritual heritage could only be passed down through language. (Ou Yangkang, 2001) As a matter of fact, the teaching communication mainly takes the languages and symbols as the intermediary. Language is the fundamental mean to exchange information, communicate emotions and transmit experiences among the communicating subjects. This illustrates that the rational use of language is the necessary condition to generate teachers' teaching communicative rationality. As Habermas said, any person in the communication activities must meet a number of universal validity requirements and assume these requirements could be verified when the individual implements any verbal behavior. (Zhang Dajun, 2007) According to Habermas' viewpoint, the teaching communication ought to set understandable languages as the premise. The teachers' languages in teaching communication should meet the following corresponding validity requirements: understandability, authenticity, sincerity and correctness, so that the teaching communication can realize rationality.

5.4 The humanized communication norm is the important guarantee.

The teaching communication relation and communication pattern should as much as possible be accepted by communication communities in order to achieve the purpose that the teachers and students can communicate and cooperate fully, sincerely and profoundly. With regards to this, the establishment of teaching communication norm must follow students' inner needs, fully mobilize the students' enthusiasm to participate and adopt their rationalized ideas. Apart from those, the communication norm can be formed during mutual negotiation and discussion, and it can also promote both the teachers and students to internalize itself as their own behavioral norms of communication, in order to guarantee and constraint their communication behaviors. It is thus clear that the humanized teaching communication norm contributes to the realization of effective teaching communication activities, and provides the system guarantee for the generation of teachers' teaching communicative rationality as well.

6. The developing strategies of teachers' teaching communicative rationality

Teachers' teaching communication rationality is the highly cohesion of teachers' teaching communicative concept, communicative wisdom and their attitude towards life. It is not only teachers' pursuit of teaching, but also the teaching realm. According to the irrational issues existing in the practice of teachers' teaching communication and the generative mechanisms of teaching communication, the following several strategies can be adopted to promote teachers' teaching communicative rationality in practice.

6.1 Reconstruction of value rationality of teaching communication

Although the humanistic teaching concept has come to a consensus, the teachers are still bunkered in the thinking mode of instrumental rationalism. That is the teachers pay more attention to the efficiency of teaching and instrumental value of classroom order than the purposeful value of students' unrestricted and independent development. They prefer to focus on the effectiveness of the results of teaching communication rather than concerning about the rationality of the process of teaching communication. The teachers attach heavier on the cognitive and practical features of teaching than the social and humanistic attributes. They put more emphasis on students' mastery of knowledge and the formation of skills than their profound communication and the construction of meaning. In view of those illustrated above, the factors determine teachers' basic value orientation and behavioral pattern, which influence teachers' communicative rationality in the process of teaching communication. In other words, for the purpose of promoting teachers' teaching communicative rationality, the first thing is to convert the bipolar opposite thinking mode of "subject—object" into the interrelated thinking mode of intersubjectivity. Secondly, the criterion of communication value with human being's existence and development as the core should be established instead of "object-orientated" as the center. The last but not the least, the "humanity and rationality---oriented" cultural spirit and behavioral pattern should be mould.

6.2 Re-understanding the meaning of teaching communication

Teachers' teaching communicative rationality is largely deprived from teachers' rational thinking and accurate understanding of teaching communication. If teachers are impercipient to the fundamental meaning of teaching communication and the great value of communication for the students' development, it will be hard for them to upgrade their teaching communicative rationality. In fact, the primary cause of teachers' irrational teaching communication is that they do not extricate themselves from the teaching framework of personal epistemology, and do not re-understand the features of teaching communication from the perspective of social epistemology. So far as it is concerned, teachers must recognize the profound meaning of teaching communication to the classroom teaching and students' development from the following aspects. Firstly, communication is the basic need of human being and the fundamental way of human being to exist and develop. Secondly, communication is not only the necessary condition for students' personal cognitive development, but also the important mechanism of students' social and personal development. Thirdly, communication is one of the essential attributes of teaching. Exact because of the polydirectional communication activities between teachers and students, the students are able to go beyond the objective activity to realize the "subject—object" development pattern. The students can obtain the condition to develop sound personality with the triple structure of "subject-object", "subject-subject" and "subject—himself".

6.3 Initiative enhancement to individual construction

Teachers should reinforce theoretical learning, construct themselves and improve themselves continuously to promote their teaching communicative rationality. The "construction" here refers that teachers should achieve their own teachers' self-awareness, self-reflection, self-fulfillment and self-improvement towards teaching communication through learning. Since teaching communication mainly takes the curricula and textbooks as the intermediary, teachers need to focus on the following aspects to enhance their own learning and construction. First, to profoundly and correctly understand and cognize disciplines, including: the function and nature of disciplines; substantial, syntactic and systematic structures of disciplines; the forms, natures and characteristics of disciplinary knowledge; the structures and features of disciplinary capability, etc. Secondly, to profoundly and correctly understand and cognize students' learning, which includes the following: formation process and mechanism of students' disciplinary core capability; ways and features of students' disciplinary thinking; modes, processes, mechanisms and features of students' disciplinary learning; learning strategies and methods of representing disciplinary taste, etc. Thirdly, to thoroughly and exactly understand and recognize teaching activities, including: understanding and processing of teaching contents; analysis and application of students' previous experiences; analysis and confirmation of teaching aims; analysis and creation of teaching situation, analysis and design of teaching activity processes; selection and application of teaching activity strategies and methods, etc.

6.4 Conscious reflection of communication practice

Practice is the basis and fountainhead of forming teachers' teaching communicative rationality. Any individual teacher's teaching communicative rationality can not be without plenty of his reflective practice. At first, teachers should be consciously aware of the function of communication in self-improvement and self-realization through practice, as well as they should seek common development of both teachers and students through communicating and exchanging ideas with students to understand and respect mutually. In the second place, the teachers ought to reflect their own roles and build the "I--you" conversational relationship with the students through practices, and timely make rational choice towards their own communicative behaviors. Thirdly, the teachers must gain the consciousness of questions and momentarily examine the rationality of teaching communication process and the effectiveness of the teaching results, and then use the results of reflection to improve the teaching communication methods and behaviors in the future. Finally, the teachers need to internalize the knowledge, experience and emotions learnt in the process of communication as their personal characteristics in order to continuously promote their own communicative wisdom and teaching level in practice.

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