

Gale, Xin Liu (1996). **Teachers, Discourses and Authority in the Postmodern Composition Classroom**. State University of New York press

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This book is an analysis of the teacher's role and authority in today's Composition Classroom. Xin Liu Gale argues that the teacher's authority is inevitable and indispensable in effective teaching. The teachers and scholars should explore how the teacher's authority functions in the pedagogic context and how it can help students develop critical literacy.

Inspired by theorists within and outside of poststructuralism Gale investigates the relationship among the teacher's and the institution's authority, the teacher's and the students' discourses. Gale then proposes a two-level interactional model of teaching based on a new discourse relationship called the edifying role of the teacher.

In her book Gale is discussing the change that has taken place in American higher education and composition studies since the late 1960s and it's moving away from basically teacher-centred pedagogy toward more students-centred teaching. In the following three decades new schools of thoughts, such as cognitivism, expressivism, social constructionism and radical pedagogy had offered different ways of changing the traditional authoritarian role of the teacher in the classroom.

The cognitivist process theory helps teachers realise the distance between the teacher's expectations and the student's performance, enabling them to become more involved in student's writing activities in order to shorten this distance. But cognitivists do not address political, social or cultural issues in the teacher's discourse and authority.

Expressivists challenge the teacher's authority by getting rid of the teacher in the writing classroom. The problem with this approach is that it risks denying the possibility of using the teacher's authority constructively to enhance students' learning.

Social constructionists question the traditional teacher's authority by demystifying the teacher's knowledge as social artefact communally created and communally maintained something that has gained its prestige through the interpretative community. Since knowledge is socially

created, social constructionists adopted the collaborative learning method in teaching writing advocating that teacher should become facilitators and collaborators in the classroom and give up the platform upon which they play the role of transmitters of knowledge. However, social constructionists' emphasis on the academic discourse as the passport to the academic community implies their tendency to privilege the teacher's discourse over the students' discourse without questioning why this should be the case. As a result, the teacher's traditional authority remains essentially intact, even though the collaborative learning approach gives the impression of a student-centred classroom.

Radical educationists' analysis of the relationship between power and literacy and their critique of the traditional classroom as a place of reproducing social injustice and inequality have contributed greatly to a new understanding of the teacher's authority in the classroom. By urging teachers to turn students into subjects and agents through dialogic method, radical educationists' attempt to change teachers from oppressive figures working for the maintenance of the status quo into critical intellectuals struggling to make society more equal and democratic. However, radical educationists' insistence on substituting for the canon a new canon consisting of "marginal works" and their implicit conviction that radical theories are morally superior to other theories threaten to impose new authority on students in the classroom, an authority that can be equally oppressive.

Thus a failure to see the interrelation between the teacher's authority and the teacher's discourse or the political nature of such a relationship is indicated by several factors: The tendency to evade political, social, and cultural issues involved in teacher authority in cognitivists' process theory, the inclination to deny the inevitability and necessity of the teacher's authority in teaching in expressivists' doctrine, and the aspiration to a superficially equal relationship between teacher and students in social constructionists' collaborative learning. As a result, these new schools of thought have offered at best, some seemingly democratic techniques of teaching writing, while leaving the basic assumptions of the traditional teacher's authority intact.

Informed by Paulo Freire's education philosophy, Richard Rorty's edifying philosophy, Bourdieu and Passeron's theory of cultural reproduction, Bakhtin's philosophy of language, and poststructural theories in literature and composition, Gale's inquiry has led to the following results:

Gale sees a need for a new description of the teacher's authority and the teacher's discourse, a description that will recognize the double-sidedness of authority and discourse so as to use them more constructively in the classroom. The composition discipline's interpretation of

Rorty's notion of normal/abnormal discourse is inadequate and limited. Gale believes that the two forms of abnormal discourse are different from each other in their relations to the dominant discourse, or normal discourse, and that they should be treated differently in the classroom.

Borrowing from Rorty, Gale describes teachers who participate in the two-level interaction in the classroom as "edifying teachers". Edifying teachers are similar to Rorty's edifying philosophers in that both speak abnormal discourse and both maintain a critical distance from normal discourse and the dominant culture. However, edifying teachers accommodate normal and abnormal discourses in teaching in such a way that the tension between the different, very often conflicting, discourses provides a space, or a context, for students to develop their own discourse. Furthermore, edifying teachers do not try to evade the tension between the authority of the institution and the autonomy of intellectuals but try to find constructive ways to turn the tension into creative power. Nor do edifying teachers try to avoid their conflicting duties of conserving the dominant culture and discourse as cultural agents on the one hand and problematizing and criticizing them as social agents for democracy on the other hand.

Instead, edifying teachers strive to make their seemingly conflicting duties productive in the teaching context. Like Rorty's edifying philosopher, they participate in the hermeneutic and "poetic" activities, trying to make connections between their own culture and other cultures or between their discipline and other disciplines. They strive to "keep Space open for the sense of wonder" by insisting on speaking abnormal discourse. They see "conservation as the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood," instead of seeing conversation as a means of searching for justification of one's discourse as the normal discourse. In short, edifying teachers differ from all other types of teachers in their ability to turn the constraints of discourse, authority, and institutional practices into creative and enabling power through communicating with their students across the boundaries of communities, cultures, discourses, and disciplines.

In Danish schools the subject of composition is integrated into language education. Still language teachers at high school level and college level might be inspired by Gale's book if they want to unhide hidden alternatives to their present routines.