

The Changing Discourse of Curriculum Reform in Contemporary Taiwan - A Foucauldian Approach

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the changing discourse of curriculum reform in Taiwan, with the minutes of the interpellations conducted by the Legislative Yuan and published in the Legislative Yuan Gazette between 1987 and 2005 as the main source of data. The changes which have occurred in the curriculum discourse since the lifting of martial law are analyzed by using such Foucauldian concepts as “discursive practice” and “discursive formation.” It was found that what was originally a complex and multifarious language of reform was simplified over time into a discourse consisting of the two themes of political localization and economic globalization. In such a discourse, curriculum reform has become a sort of mediating language reflecting both political exigencies and the pressure to maintain economic competitiveness.

INTRODUCTION

From Michel Foucault's ^[1-3] view, the language we use forms into a sort of structure, what he calls a “discourse.” In turn, such discourses largely determine the views and behavior of the members of the society or culture in which they have currency. Language, then, is not as transparent and straightforward as is often assumed. For, rather than being merely a medium of communication or a simple tool for conveying facts, language, like so many other objects and events in the world, is a rather nebulous phenomenon. Foucault ^[3] asserts that each level of society has its particular discourses, and that these come together to compose an intricate network, the meanings and limitations of which inform and give structure to all the activities of a given society. In this paper I adopt this post-structural perspective to examine how the discourse of curriculum reform in Taiwan was formed, how it has developed, and the various ways in which it determines our understanding and behavior with respect to the changes which have been made to the national curriculum in the post-martial-law era. I adopt Foucault's “archeological approach” to describe the related processes of emergence, exclusion, substitution, and transformation which have become part and parcel of the discourse on curriculum reform ^[1,2]. In particular, I explore the trajectory of the curriculum reforms which have taken place during the post-martial-law period; the provenance of the language of the discourse; the types of discourses and linguistic structures employed; and the result all this has had on curriculum reform. In fact, it's possible that the greatest significance of these reforms lies not in the modifications to the curriculum, course content, and teaching methods used, but rather in the subtle changes which they bring about in the sense of identity of the teachers, students, and citizens of Taiwan.

A FOUCAULDIAN APPROACH TO DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND DATA-COLLECTION

In the following section I briefly describe Foucault's discursive analysis, before proceeding to use it as an analytical tool to describe the discourse of curriculum reform in Taiwan.

Foucauldian Approach to Discourse Analysis

The primary analytical strategy employed in this paper is Foucault's ^[3] discourse analysis, as described in his works *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *The Discourse on Language*. To be sure, his discourse theory has been criticized on a number

of grounds, e.g., as retaining the vestiges of structuralism and for failing to take into account non-linguistic social movements and the influence of human initiative on the relationship between a discourse and power ^[4,5]. Nonetheless, such important concepts as discursive practice, discursive formation and “the subject of the statement” constitute an essential counterbalance to the traditional and widespread assumption in the social sciences that language is a simple and straightforward medium of communication which serves to directly and transparently convey our views and ideas without smuggling in, as it were, insidious subtexts.

Foucault ^[3] asserts that history and culture are formed out of a wide variety of discourses, and that such discourses are the means by which certain groupings in society establish and propagate systems of meaning. Foucault ^[6,7] further points out that, far from being merely a way of using language to communicate ideas, a discourse invariably involves power and the intention to further a certain agenda embedded within the discourse. In the Marxian analysis, such agendas camouflaged within language act as a power base in that they serve to legitimate and maintain the socio-economic structure of society ^[3,8-10]. However, Foucault ^[3] goes a step further by pointing out that a discourse is a type of inclusionary/exclusionary system, the rules of which not only determine what can be said, but also how and who can say it ^[11-13]. Different discourses may either conflict or support one another; yet, in Foucault’s ^[3] view, they ultimately constitute what he calls a “system of dispersion.” As Foucault puts it: Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functioning, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation ^[3].

Thus, the process of elucidating the relationship between a discourse and its statements is essentially a matter of following the marks which lead to a discursive formation. A discursive formation consists mainly of statements which take the form of simple sentences, but derive their full meaning not from cultural norms, but rather by their scope of usage and the circumstances in which they operate. In other words, a statement doesn’t operate in isolation; rather, it manifests its significance through the network of relationships it forms with various other statements. Moreover, there exists a distinctive relationship between a statement and a subject. For Foucault ^[3] the “subject of the statement” is not used to analyze the relationship between the speaker and what is said, but rather to probe into the question of the position one must be in if one is to become a “speaking subject.” Thus the “site of a speaking subject” is not construed as merely the subject of the statement and what is said. In other words, rather than asking “Who is saying what?” we need to ask “What is the position of the speaker?” and “What is the operational relationship by which the speaker comes into such a position whereby it becomes possible to present a certain discourse as true?”

While discursive formation includes innumerable statements, these statements don’t expand and multiply indefinitely; rather, they operate according to the “rule of rarity.” By rarity, what Foucault ^[3] meant is how, in the process of discursive formation, things and events are isolated and simplified, with the result that what was originally a complex information structure is given a definite shape with a central idea. Despite the unlimited possibilities of interpretation and meaning, it is only a minority of these meanings expressed in public discourse. Therefore, a formation implies an emergence of a system of inclusion and exclusion, which is significant in a transformative society.

Following Foucault’s concept of discourse, in this paper I investigate changing discourses of curriculum reform which have occurred and been carried out in Taiwan since the lifting of martial law. It is in this way that a shifting discourse of curriculum reform can demonstrate how a sense of curriculum reform comes about and make sense of people’s ways of doing reform.

Data Collection

The minutes of the Education Committee of the Legislative Yuan published in the Legislative Yuan Gazette between 1987 and 2005 constituted the main source of data for this study. These minutes were selected because of their relative completeness, and also because in the post-martial-law period the topics discussed in official interpellations of the Legislative Yuan frequently became the focus of media attention and public discussion, and thus have had a definite influence on educational reform policies.

Additional data was collected for the same period from Chinese-language newspapers in Taiwan (mainly the China Times, the United Daily News, and the Liberty Times); the bulletins, minutes, and archives of the Ministry of Education (MOE) ^[14]; and related academic papers. I also conducted interviews with two scholars of education involved in the curriculum reform process; two parliamentary assistants responsible for helping to draft official documents related to the interpellations on curriculum reform; and a reporter who wrote a number of articles on curriculum reform for Commonwealth magazine.

CHANGING CURRICULUM REFORM DISCOURSE SINCE 1987

The curriculum reform discourse which began in 1987 can be divided into three phases. The first phase covers 1987 to 1990, an important period in the gradual implementation of democracy in Taiwan. Because local consciousness became a major issue at this time, the main theme during this phase was localization for education. The second phase covers 1990 to 1996, a period in which a discursive field of curriculum reform took shape and made possible what can be said about curriculum reform. The third phase covers 1996 to 2005, for it was during this period that the Final Consultative Report on Educational Reform was completed. It was also during this time that political and economic developments led to steadily increasing concern over Taiwan’s ability to maintain its competitiveness in the global economic arena, with the result that globalization came to occupy an increasingly important position in the discourse on curriculum reform ^[15,16].

1987–1990: Discourse about "Localizing Education"

The lifting of martial law in 1987 signaled a return to civil society, and brought to an end the long-standing restrictions on assembly, demonstrations, and public discussion of political affairs, resulting in greatly expanded opportunities for public participation in policy formation, as well as the public scrutiny of government bodies. These far-reaching changes converged with the growing momentum of the Taiwanization movement to stir up a powerful wave of calls for curriculum reform.

At the end of the 1980s, as members of the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) gradually found their way into the political arena, they began to question the marginalization of Taiwan in the national history curriculum^[17]. During the 4th sitting of the 79th session of the Education Committee of the Legislative Yuan, legislator Huang stated: The history of Taiwan should be added to the history curriculum, as at present it is conspicuously absent. There should also be added material relating to Taiwanese identity. It will be a long time before Taiwan reverts to China, and students primarily need to know about the place in which they live, so the MOE needs to make appropriate provision for related subjects in the curriculum^[17].

The Minister of the MOE, responded as follows: The present curriculum already includes the history of Taiwan. Because students at all levels already have so many required classes, it would be very difficult to add a separate subject on the history of Taiwan. So it's best to continue teaching the history of Taiwan as part of the general history curriculum^[17].

From this exchange it can be seen that, even on the eve of the lifting of martial law, legislators still found it necessary to present the idea of Taiwanese identity under the umbrella of "opposing mainland China," as a way of lending legitimacy to their statements. In the Minister's view, however, the history of Taiwan was already adequately covered in the existing history curriculum, and, in any case, students simply wouldn't have enough time for an additional required course.

However, between 1975 and 1990 no changes were made to the national curriculum, despite this being a period of remarkable social and political change on the island, mainly due to steady economic growth, the formation of opposition parties, and the emergence of powerful social movements. It was also during this same period that the MOE began to step out of its traditional role as a dependable mechanism for promoting the version of national consciousness put forward by the ruling party, the Kuomintang (KMT), resulting in an unprecedented test of its role and functions.

Moreover, in the 1989 election campaigns "Localize education" was adopted as the main campaign slogan of the opposition parties. At that time calls for curriculum reform were steadily gaining momentum, and the MOE was being pressured to implement reforms by both the public and the Parliament. It finally forced the Minister of the MOE, to make a public announcement that the history, geography, and native languages of Taiwan would be added to the existing curriculum in 1993.

1990–1996: Forming the Field of Discourse for Curriculum Reform

The way in which the discourse on curriculum reform gradually took shape between 1990 and 1996 can be elucidated by examining three key discursive fields at that time. The first is constituted by the discussions in the media and academia on the localization of education by individual cities and counties, a movement which gained impetus from the lifting of martial law.

The second is constituted by a number of official documents which received widespread media coverage and evolved into a discourse referred to as "Taiwanese subjectivity." Notable examples include "Retrieving the History of Taiwan from the Textbook", a written interpellation made by the Legislative Yuan to the MOE; "The Inclusion of Taiwanese Literature in the Mandarin Textbooks Used in Primary and Secondary Schools", a report by the Minister of the MOE; and "The Position of the Geography of Taiwan in the Geography Textbooks Used in Primary and Secondary Schools"^[17], an academic report written for the Legislative Yuan.

The third one consists of the views put forth by the 410 Educational Reform Movement, initiated by the Alliance for Educational Reform on April 10, 1996^[18]; and a document prepared between 1994 and 1996 by the Executive Yuan's Committee on Educational Reform (CER) titled the Final Consultative Report on Educational Reform^[19]. This report presents a wide range of views and set the tone for subsequent discourse on curriculum reform.

In the following sections I discuss these three lines of curriculum reform statements, coming together and forming a network of discursive formation for curriculum reform in detail.

Localizing curriculum as a form of democracy

Following the lead of Yilan County, in the early 1990s a number of cities and counties began to develop localized educational materials and instruction in local languages, with many primary and secondary schools using the time allotted to clubs or after-school activities to hold these supplemental courses^[20]. It was also at this time that there began to appear academic papers on the localization of education^[21-23]. In addition to defining what is meant by the term "localized education," these papers cover such practical topics as content, teaching methodology, teaching materials, and how such classes could be integrated into the existing curriculum.

The Curriculum Standards for Primary Schools, revised and announced in 1993 and took effect in 1996. These Standards stipulate that a new subject titled "Localized Educational Activities" be included in the curriculum beginning in grade three. The implementation of this "new" curriculum policy by the MOE had two important implications: 1) With respect to the official policy on

education, it established the legitimacy of localized education; and 2) with respect to educational practice, it allowed for a certain amount of autonomy in the implementation of educational localization, and it indirectly encouraged teachers to design their own courses. This educational trend can be seen as a reflection of the democratization of Taiwanese society which was taking place at that time, in which democracy was seen not merely as the holding of elections, but also as the freedom to modify the curriculum and establish educational organizations. Thus the combination of curriculum reform and participation in the democratic process gave rise to the formation of a sort of discourse centered on the interpretation of curriculum reform, and related academic papers began to appear with increasing frequency ^[24-27].

The discursive politics of the curriculum reform in Legislative Yuan

During the same period, just as the media was focusing the spotlight on the efforts being made by local government bodies to localize a supposed national curriculum, the term “Taiwanese subjectivity” began to be used with increasing regularity in both the Legislative Yuan and various city and county assemblies, presenting a serious challenge to the “greater China” mentality of the national curriculum as enshrined in the standardized textbooks published by the National Institute for Compilation and Translation (NICT). For example, on December 19, 1994, during the 4th session of the 2nd term of the Legislative Yuan, a scholar of history at Academia Sinica, presented to the Education Committee his views on the role of the history of Taiwan in primary and secondary school textbooks. He criticized the perfunctory treatment of history during the early years of martial law as follows:

The textbooks currently in use all present the history of Taiwan as if it were a part of China, and this needs to be changed . . . The “economic miracle” which has occurred in Taiwan has not come from mainland China, but rather has come about through the diligent efforts of the people of Taiwan. So the textbooks need to be amended . . . This is something which needs to be solved at the institutional level. The history curriculum should be systematically divided into the history of Taiwan, the history of China, and World history. Otherwise, slogans such as “Know Taiwan” amount to a lot of hot air. Reforming the curriculum to tally with current needs will help to solve a lot of problems in Taiwan ^[17].

During the same sitting, the Deputy Minister of the MOE, presented a report on the role of the history of Taiwan in the textbooks used in primary and secondary schools, the main points of which are as follows:

Textbooks are the most basic type of teaching material, and are extensively used by both teachers and students, so they need to reflect the changes and developments which are taking place in society . . . At present, the history of Taiwan is included in the textbooks not as a subject in itself, but only in the context of related topics. However, in recent years we have come to realize that, as residents of Taiwan, we need to be more familiar with the history and culture of Taiwan . . . In order to meet the changing needs of the times . . . the textbooks used in primary and secondary schools should be thoroughly revised . . . so that students will have a deeper understanding and appreciation of the place where they live. Thus it is necessary to add more material on the history and culture of Taiwan, at the same time promoting related research and teacher training ^[17].

The 4th session of the 2nd term of the Legislative Yuan’s Education Committee was held on October 12, 1994, and nearly the entire session was spent discussing the subjectivity of Taiwan in school textbooks and related questions. The main ideas discussed and line of reasoning were as follows: 1) the importance of establishing a Taiwanese subjectivity; 2) lies in its opposition to the “greater China” mentality; 3) so it is necessary to revise the existing textbooks; 4) and make the process of preparing and approving more transparent; 5) textbooks produced in such a manner will be much more relevant to the needs and experience of students; and 6) this process is an essential part of establishing the subjectivity of Taiwan. Thus it can be seen that nearly all of the language of curriculum reform was related to the subjectivity of Taiwan, with the result that the discussions on the process by which textbooks are prepared and approved ^[17] degenerated into a heated battle in the Legislative Yuan, with “Greater China” and “Bring Taiwan into the textbooks” as the main rallying cries.

Thus it can be seen that at that time the language and politics of curriculum reform related to making changes to the system by which textbooks are produced was dominated by the twin concepts of the subjectivity of Taiwan and the actual experience of students. The resulting discursive formation consisted of the dualities of “diversity versus homogeneity,” “native versus greater China,” and “Taiwan-oriented textbooks versus China-oriented textbooks.” This set of dualities formed what Fraser ^[28, 29] calls the “discursive face of hegemony,” in which there is practically no space left for any dissenting language. In such a discourse, it’s inevitable that alternative voices get sidelined, such as those concerned with democratic institutions or the learning environment of students. A detailed examination of the official interpellations conducted by the Legislative Yuan in 1994 and 1995 demonstrates that most statements on the issue of the system used to determine the content of the textbooks used in primary and secondary schools were made from a particular political perspective, while few were made from the perspective of education itself.

Emerging a discourse consisting of two polarities - localization and globalization

During the same period a grassroots educational reform movement began to gain momentum throughout Taiwan, culminating in a demonstration on April 4, 1994, in which some 100,000 people

hit the streets under the banner of “Education in Crisis.” Having gained a voice in the discourse on educational reform, this grassroots movement put forth four demands for the future of education in Taiwan: 1) smaller schools and classes; 2) the establishment of more high schools and universities;

3) the modernization of education; and 4) the drafting of the Educational Fundamental Act. In response to the pressure being exerted by this grassroots movement, as much as by political considerations, on September 21 of the same year the Executive Yuan formally established the CER, and pronounced 1994 as the “Year of Education.” The Premier congratulated the birth of the CER and stated: “The national education of the future needs to be characterized by flexibility; an international perspective; practicality; a humanistic outlook; academic excellence; and foresight. In short, we need to take a whole new approach to learning, one which fits in with the needs of the 21st century” ^[17]. In the Final Consultative Report on Educational Reform subsequently prepared by the CER, this vision of the future of education in Taiwan was expressed as follows:

In order to meet the needs of society in the 21st century, education must become more proactive and give more importance to person-centered learning, democracy, diversity, technology, and internationalization. By “person-centered” is meant educating the entire person, with an emphasis on fostering character, ability, and a wholesome way of thinking, in such a way that the individual learner can reach his or her highest potential. By “democratic” is meant promoting autonomy in education and increasing the educational choices available to students. At the same time, education needs to promote a sense of social responsibility, respect for the law, and the importance of making good choices. By “diversity” is meant increasing the educational opportunities available to minorities and disadvantaged groups in society. By “technology” is meant promoting the scientific outlook, knowledge of modern technology, and the cultivation of the skills essential for solving the problems facing modern society. By “internationalization” is meant understanding, respecting, and appreciating the traditions of different cultures and ethnic groups, at the same time valuing our own local culture and developing its strengths ^[19].

In addition to promoting the use of technology and the internet in education, the Final Consultative Report on Educational Reform also suggested that primary school students should be taught the English alphabet and that preparations be made for instituting mandatory English courses for primary schools ^[19]. Furthermore, the Final Consultative Report on Educational Reform lists person-centered learning, democracy, diversity, technology, and internationalization as the key areas of reform, but no mention is made of localization.

Amongst the members of the CER, there is a most influential member, Yin Yun-peng who represented the interests of industry, by virtue of her prominent position at Common Wealth magazine. The series of special issues on educational reform published by Common Wealth included an article titled “The Boundless Age,” which begins with the following quote from the Final Consultative Report on Educational Reform:

Future generations will live in a world characterized by rapid change, information- based economies, and international competition. In the new century, in so many different areas- international competition, social harmony, sustainable development, and quality of life- education will be the key to success ^[30].

The use of such language reflects high expectations for the future of education in Taiwan, as well as the forward and outward orientation of educational reform. In our interview with one of the contributors to this series of issues, it was pointed out that primary and secondary school teachers were expected to be its main readers. In the past, the magazine’s readership base consisted mainly of the business elite, but this series was intended to expand its readership by focusing on a topic which would have more appeal to the middle class. As such, what may have been intended primarily as a shrewd marketing strategy not only increased sales volume, but also catapulted Common Wealth to the center of the discourse on educational reform?

Due to interaction and mutual influence over a number of years, the three fields of discourse on educational reform mentioned above gradually transformed from a complex and multifarious meaning structure into a discourse consisting of the two polarities of localization and globalization. In other words, in the confrontational political atmosphere which followed the lifting of martial law, the curriculum reform dialogue centered on Taiwanization vs Sinicization, with the former eventually coming to the fore. Such a course of development gives concrete expression to the importance given to adding teaching material on Taiwan to the curriculum, as well as the related concern with liberalizing the policies governing the production of textbooks. However, between 1994 and 1996, a time of widespread discussion of the educational crisis, when business, government, and academia were coming together to work out a vision of education for the future, there gradually emerged another discourse—internationalization. These two orientations are reflected in the language used in the Final Consultative Report on Educational Reform. At this time the localization discourse still held the upper ground, but it eventually came to form the basis of the globalization discourse.

1996–2005: Economic Globalization in the Spotlight

There are two main reasons why economic globalization became the focus of the discourse on curriculum reform after 1996: 1) the tone set in the Final Consultative Report on Educational Reform carried over into the implementation of the “nine-year integrated curriculum”; and 2) the changing international economic situation, especially the increasing pressure to compete in the international economic arena. To be sure, during this period the localization discourse was not completely superseded by the globalization discourse; but due to an increasing number of factors to be considered, it did lose some of its previous appeal. In the following sections I discuss the curriculum reforms centering on economic globalization on three levels: 1) the scholarly discourse relating to the nine-year integrated curriculum; 2) the culture of the Legislative Yuan trivializing curriculum reform policy; and 3) learning English as internationalization.

The scholarly discourse relating to the nine-year integrated curriculum

Following five years of preparations, in 1998 the MOE announced its new nine-year integrated curriculum, the description of which included the reasons for the modifications it contained:

On the eve of the 21st century, educational reform is on the rise worldwide, and Taiwan is no exception, and such reforms are essential to maintaining the nation's international competitiveness . . . The main reasons for the curriculum reforms are as follows: First of all come the requirements of national development. Observing development trends around the world, it is clear that internationalization is the wave of the future. It is thus necessary to implement educational reforms which will help students realize their potential, bring overall social advancement, and enhance international competitiveness . . . Next comes public opinion. In recent years all sectors of society have been expressing a keen interest in educational reform. In the Final Consultative Report on Educational Reform prepared by the Executive Yuan's CER there are suggestions concerning the No Child Left Behind policy, curriculum reform, early study of English, promoting essential academic attainment and easing the restrictions on primary and secondary education? As all these suggestions reflect public opinion, in implementing educational reform it is necessary to take them into account ^[31].

Of all the modifications of the curriculum carried out since the educational reform process began in 1987, the introduction of the nine-year integrated curriculum marked the first reform to be formulated not only in response to domestic political and social pressure, but also due to external economic circumstances. For it was at this time that rapid economic growth in mainland China and a general decline in the global economy were both exerting considerable pressure on Taiwan. It was in such an economic environment that Common Wealth came out with its series on educational reform, and most of the articles were related to economic competitiveness. Moreover, as democracy began to lay down firm roots in Taiwan, education itself gradually came to form a sort of subjective character of reform. Professor Chen, a former member of the CER who also played an important role in the formulation of the nine-year integrated curriculum, believes that the impetus for the nine-year integrated curriculum came from the educational reform subjectivity which gradually formed in response to 410 Educational Reform Movement, a subjectivity which arose from the self-examination of the educational system itself. In his words: The solution to the rigid formalism of the traditional education system of the past lies in the nine-year integrated curriculum and schools outside of the educational system . . . Such things don't happen overnight; but at least they do bring attention back to the essence of education. Take, for example, respecting the individuality of the student, genuine concern in education, and the professional autonomy of teachers; these are all things we've been neglecting for a long time (personal interview).

In accordance with the "new perspective on curriculum reform", the national curriculum was restructured into seven main subjects: languages; math; social studies; art and culture; health and physical education; nature and life sciences; and integrated activities. The idea was that each subject should be coordinated with all the others, and the amount of class time was reduced and made more flexible. Also, individual schools were allowed to set up a curriculum development committee, and community participation was encouraged in order to adapt to local needs and differences, both of which helped schools to develop their own distinct characteristics. Moreover, emphasis was given to ten essential abilities which go beyond mere book learning: self-understanding and developing one's potential; originality; career planning and lifelong learning; communication and sharing; cooperation and respect for others; culture and international understanding; planning, organizing, and implementing; information technology; self-initiated learning; and independent thinking and problem solving.

In sum, these innovative reforms were intended to go well beyond the politically limited thinking of the early post-martial-law period. These reforms introduced into the curriculum a range of new concepts, including the integrated curriculum, teachers' action research, co-teaching strategies, and the school-based curriculum. This reform discourse was intended to transform the mentality and culture of the entire educational system, as indicated by such new ideas as teacher empowerment, flexibility with respect to student potential, and democratic participation in school curriculum development and administration. However, good intentions notwithstanding, it was inevitable that the implementation of such reforms would encounter numerous problems, many of which had to do with the difficulty of making changes to established test-driven culture in school. Moreover, at the same time that the new curriculum was generating considerable debate in society, there came to be an increasingly wide gap between the original ideas of the reforms and the actual content of the official interpellations conducted in the Legislative Yuan.

The discursive culture of legislative Yuan trivializing curriculum reform policy

From start to finish, the mainstream discourse on curriculum reform has been deeply influenced by the political environment of the Parliament, and it would be no exaggeration to say that in the discursive politics of the Parliament, "returning to the essence of education" is little more than another glib slogan. As recorded in the Legislative Yuan Gazette between 1998 and 2003, nearly all of the official proceedings on curriculum reform focused on administratively technical questions. Examples include teacher training programs for the nine-year integrated curriculum, the procedural issues related to the textbook production, and pedagogical issues of the teaching local languages and the qualifications of English teachers etc ^[17].

From the time the nine-year integrated curriculum was announced in 1998 and its actual implementation in 2005, the MOE had three different Ministers. This was the period when the DPP gained the reins of power for the first time, and when various problems arose related to the new curriculum each of these Ministers was brought to task in the Legislative Yuan.

Quite a few members of the electorate, especially parents and teachers, regularly inform their legislators about their views on curriculum reform. After sifting these views and repackaging them into the “public opinion” of such interest to the media, the legislators then make them the basis of their interpellations. Yet, how the legislators choose which information and topics for inclusion in the interpellation remains rather abstruse.

As one of the assistants put it: “It’s possible that some legislators exaggerate and pander to the media; sometimes this sort of thing interferes with the policies of the MOE. For example, the MOE may be in the process of gradually implementing a certain policy, but before it has had enough time to show any results, lots of legislators hype the issue in the media, thereby misleading society” (personal interview). Apart from regularly throwing their weight around in the interpellations, legislators are in the habit of relying on vague generalities and emotional bias, all the while adopting a solemn attitude about establishing education policies. Below is an extract from an exchange between a legislator and the Minister of the MOE during an interpellation:

Legislator: The final question is about the meaning of “school-based curriculum” . . .

We’ve never heard this term used before . . .

Minister: It means that in the future, schools will be able to plan their own curriculum.

Legislator: Impossible! There is no such curriculum. A curriculum is all about content; it’s not about schools, teachers, and the like . . . We have some doubts about this so-called “school-based curriculum” and we feel that excessively fancy language is being used . . . ^[17].

This kind of exchange in the parliamentary interpellations is by no means atypical, so it’s not surprising that in such an environment serious discussions of the ideals of education and the general direction of curriculum reform tend to fall by the wayside.

Learning English as internationalization

From 1996 into the 2000s the discourse on curriculum reform also included a sub-discourse on English learning and globalization. Of particular interest is the period from 2001 to 2005, when in the contexts of internationalization or globalization “foreign language education” was typically synonymous with “learning English.” During this time, articles and discussions on learning English occupied a considerable amount of space on the pages of the three main Chinese-language newspapers in Taiwan, and one of these, the China Times, even ran a series of in-depth reports on globalization and teaching English to young children. In such articles any discussion on the importance and proper role of learning English was by and large placed in the context of “international competition” and “internationalization.” For its part, the media, continually on the lookout for a new opportunity for gaining a larger market share, spared no effort in hyping English learning into another hot topic.

Foreign-language cram schools were quick to capitalize on the latest craze for learning English by striving to impress on parents, ever eager to ensure that their offspring get ahead in society, the relationship between learning English and increasing one’s international competitiveness. As a result, nearly all the advertisements used by English cram schools and even kindergartens began to emphasize that learning English is the first step in increasing a child’s competitiveness, despite a dearth of scientific evidence to back such claims.

Such a discourse on learning English played a negligible role in the educational reform discourse of the early 1990s. In early 1990s, localization had already moved to the center of the educational reform discourse, and doubts about the suitability of making English an elective course in primary schools led to a parliamentary interpellation on the matter. The main reasons given in opposition to such a course were a lack of qualified teachers; generating inequality between students; parental pressure; and the students’ widely divergent backgrounds in English. Thus there was concern that such classes would have a deleterious effect on academic performance, and even hinder the learning of Chinese ^[17].

From early 1990s to 2000s, the discourse of teaching English in early age shifted. Until 2000, the widespread pressure to learn English is reflected in the parliamentary interpellations, and it exerted a considerable influence on the language policies of the MOE. For example, during a 2002 interpellation, legislator Guo simplified the topic of internationalization into foreign language study (i.e., English), and suggested that English be officially designated as the main international language of Taiwan, and as the second language in the workplace, since doing so would promote Taiwan’s economic development ^[17]. Actually, there exist no rigorous studies showing a connection between learning English (or language learning in general) and economic strength. Yet, the logic of the English-learning market is much more compelling than the political considerations associated with localization during 2000s. Thus learning English has attracted the attention of a large number of middle-class consumers - the parents of primary and secondary school students.

The global economic downturn which began in 1998 provided an opportunity for English learning in the guise of globalization to gain a foothold in the discourse on educational reform. With the continuing clamor over globalization and international competitiveness, by 2005 these two topics were poised to overtake localization in the discourse on educational reform. This, however, never transpired, mainly due to a lack of related discourses to team up with, as well as the lack of a social movement to provide extra impetus. As a result, the discourse on internationalization and globalization ended up being simplified into banal

talk about the connection between language ability and job opportunities. Such a simplification of language yielded a concept easily understood by a public anxious about the future of the economy, and it comes as no surprise that English cram schools wasted no time in making the most of this in their marketing efforts ^[32].

CONCLUSION

By analyzing the language of the discourse I discover how it influences the implementation of curriculum reform policies, as well as the way in which a policy is implemented influences the development of the discourse. In such a changing discourse analysis we come to understand how our image of education is molded by the discourse on educational reform.

During the period in question, the two main themes of the discourse on educational reform were political localization and economic globalization, and the changes which took place in the discourse were largely a result of the emergence, development, and interaction of these two themes. In such a discourse, curriculum reform became a sort of mediating language reflecting both the political exigencies of curriculum reform and the hope of economic improvement. In general, public opinion in Taiwan holds that education should not be politicized and that curriculum reform should be left to the profession of education. Nonetheless, education (as well as school curriculum) never exists in a social vacuum, but rather is necessarily carried out through mutual interaction with politics, economics, and culture. Due to the prevailing sociopolitical environment in Taiwan, the curriculum reform discourse has been forced to adopt the language of national identity and economic necessity. The discourse formed by the exchanges in the parliamentary interpellations between legislators and representatives of the MOE on teaching English, history curriculum and local languages reveals a tug of war between the politics of national identity (localization) and the requirements of economic development (globalization).

In such an environment, it comes as no surprise that the curriculum reforms carried out during the period in question were by and large guided by political and economic considerations, as shown by the language of discourse in which they are expressed. Ironically, education has been defined in terms of political and economic concepts, while we think it should play a greater role in steering the discursive contour of curriculum reform.

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