Critical Discourse Analysis of Classroom Interaction

Laura Rita PITARIU

Universitatea „Lucian Blaga" din Sibiu, Domeniul Filologie
"Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, Department of Humanities and Arts: Philology Studies
Personal e-mail: laura.pitariu@yahoo.com

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This paper aims to provide an overview of the pervasive relationship between Critical Discourse Analysis practice and classroom interaction. Three instances of classroom interaction have been considered, namely: critical classroom moments, teacher-parents relations and classroom positive psychology, in order to analyse the impact of the didactic discourse on teachers, students and parents and their interaction, as well as, the transformation the didactic discourse in time.

Keywords: didactic discourse, critical discourse analysis, classroom interaction, classroom, positive psychology, classroom discourse

Critical Discourse Analysis is a compilation of theories and methods which are problem-oriented and cross-curricular. Analysing discourse has been broadly addressed by linguists and some of them considered classroom discourse as subject of their study. We will pay attention to three classroom instances which represent a fruitful avenue for my future research.

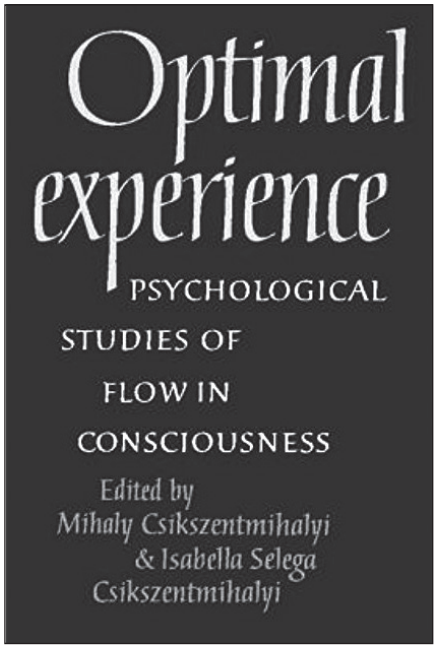
CDA in Critical Classroom Moments and the Impact of Teachers' Discourse on Students

In her dissertation paper, Theresa Abodeeb-Gentile, professor at the University of Massachusetts, highlighted the dominant discourses that were present in a school classroom interaction and how they contributed to develop students' literacy identities, using the Fairclough's model of CDA analysis. She analysed both classroom curriculum and classroom events to emphasize the way in which sociocultural factors influence classroom discourse.

She based her study on five critical classroom moments which she analysed in order to follow the evolution of the students' identities within the frame of the dominant classroom discourse. The five moments consisted in "instances of students" taking an oppositional place to the teacher's authority power and the discursive classroom practices," since she considered those moments as relevant to see how the identity of a student is formed and influenced by classroom discourses and practices.

After analysing transcripts, the conclusion was that students presented various literacy identities which were interrelated to the discursive literacy classroom practices while the use of CDA provided a means to deconstruct both discourses and interactions. (Abodeeb-Gentile, 2008: 230).

The impact of teachers' words on learners is evident. In his article, "Talking in Class" (2011), Johnston, a professor at the University of Albany, New York, and his colleagues, emphasise the influence of



teachers' talk on students. They examine the teacher's talk in a classroom of students and point out that the way a teacher choses his / her language has direct implications on students' imagination and social relationships. A teacher's words will signal to students what we think about them, what our expectations are, how we value. Depending on teachers' goals, their talk can be different.

What Johnston calls "*strategies of talking*", we would call "*types of discourses*", used in different contexts in order to develop students' communicative and critical thinking abilities. Johnston suggests some principles to guide teachers' conduct of classroom discourse. They should start classroom talk, encouraging students to think critically about a certain topic / text. Secondly, teachers should listen "carefully and genuinely" (Johnston, 2011:235) and try to turn students' attention towards the causal process, not on accuracy. Students should be encouraged to be independent in thinking and express their own beliefs and finally be the decisions makers in finding solutions to social problems. It is obvious that positive language choices will be efficient in classroom talk, since language is the most powerful tool in classroom and a good choice of language and discourse will enable students and teachers overcome critical moments, as well.

Also, Johnston, in his book "Choice Words: How Our Language Affects Children's Learning" (2004), discusses the effects of classroom discourse on students. Basing parts of her 2011 dissertation paper on Johnston's book, Sharon Patenaude tackles the problem of the impact of the teacher's talk on learners and claims that the classroom climate, as well as students' discourses, are influenced directly by the teachers' discourse. Johnston analysed interviews with teachers who have very good students and noticed that those teachers made use of the same curriculum and materials like all the other teachers, concluding that it was not *what* they taught but *how* they taught that was important.

Patenaude gives the example used by Johnston (2011:4-5) of a sentence said by the teacher: "That group, get back to work or you'll be staying in at lunch." Although the message seems to be simple, that is that the students should finish before lunch, students could also interpret that sentence as "we are labouring, we are slaves […] and the teacher has authoritarian control" (Johnston 2004:4). Teachers' discourse build students' behaviour and their interpretation of the world around.

She identifies in Johnston's work six categories of teachers' discourse to which attention should be paid in classroom interaction and especially, in critical moments.

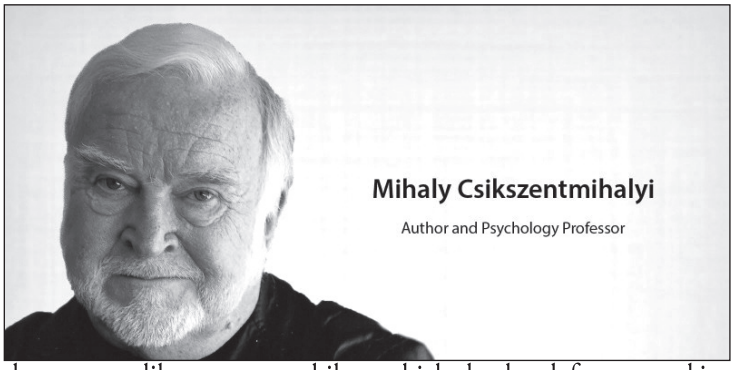
A first type of discourse is that of "*naming and noticing*". This refers to the ability to notice, name and classify, which is very important in a classroom process of teaching-learning-evaluating. On the one hand, teachers notice problems in the students' discourse or interpretation and, through means of language, try to obtain another feedback. On the other hand, students recognize types, genres, styles and categorize them.

Identity is the second category of teachers' classroom discourse. Teachers' discourse will definitely influence students' identities, although the process is also reversible, since students' identities will also have an impact on teachers' organization of discourse. If a student's incorrect behaviour is corrected with "that's not like you," he will be helped to create his self-identity, being able to make him understand he is not a bad student or a misbehaving one, for instance. (Patenaude, 2011:30).

"Strategies and Agency". Teachers' discourse can also invite students to understand how they should solve a particular problem. However, teaching strategies is not enough, since teachers should also foster students' ability to create their own strategies.

The sense of agency is defined by Johnston as students' ability to be convinced that if, they act strategically when they finish school, they can accomplish their goals. (Johnston 2004: 29). During classroom practices, students are invited by teachers to act as agents in analysing texts or social events. Patenaude identified in Johnston's work three instances to increase students' sense of agency: students have to be ensured that the world around can be changed, that they have the power to change the world around and finally, that literacy is defined by their knowledge and ability to change their world.

VanDeWeghe, professor at the University of Colorado, even gives some examples of language utterances that can be used during teacher's discourse



so as to encourage students to act like an agent while analysing a particular text:

> "How did you figure that out?"
> "How are you planning to go about this?"
> "Where are you going with this piece [of writing]?"
> "Why…?" (VanDeWeghe, 2005: 73).

Generalization. Starting from what they have already known or experienced, students should be encouraged to flexibly generalize information about the world around. Students must be taught to make connections with different other fields of knowledge and to critically construct reality. The question "what if" will definitely help students become imaginative and enable them make hypothetical speculation. (Johnston in Patenaude, 2011:33).

Knowing. The traditional teaching model is based on the pattern of teacher being the provider and student being the one who needs to be provided with information. The model is also called IRE, meaning that the teacher *initiates* discourse, students *respond* and finally the teacher *evaluates* answers (Johnston, 2004: 54 in Patenaude 2011: 33). Both Johnston and Patenaude, as well as many others, suggest that this model should be changed so that the teacher might share this role of "the one who knows" with the students. Students can also come up with what they know in order to improve experience and information. This also gives a chance to the teacher to avoid critical moments during classroom discourses, since students are directly involved in the process.

As presented above, critical moments in learning communities can successfully be overcome if the classroom discourse is a democratic and well-organized one.

CDA in Teacher - Parents Relations

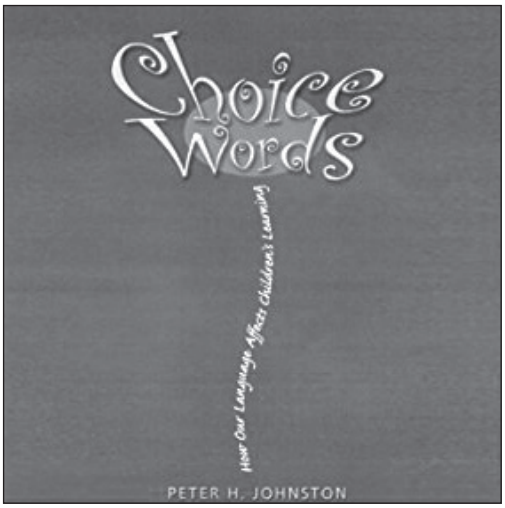
The discourse between teachers and parents can be definitely considered another part of the didactic discourse. Parental involvement in their children's education has come to be a very much addressed topic in the education studies. The interest of the researchers in this topic is also due to the legislative directions, which clearly ask for parental involvement in nowadays education.

The Regulation concerning the organisation and the functioning of the Romanian pre-university school institutions (called from now on ROFUIP-Regulamentul de organizare și funcționare a unităților de învățământ preuniversitar) states in Articles 169 and 170 that parents are the main partners of an education institution and that they should be consulted about the process of education at all levels. The Education Law of Romania also states in Article 79 that parents and families are the secondary beneficiaries of the system of education. This background is a justification of the various actions and initiatives to attract parents close to school activities.

The discourse between parents and teachers can be analysed at the levels of three types of relations between the two parts involved: traditional, managerial and democratic. (Bennett, 2005:13). In the traditional model of teacher-parent relation, the teacher is responsible for the education process, and parents, as outsiders, support their children. The managerial model assumes that the teacher is still the expert in education, but parents are more involved in the process, especially at the level of dictating policies and regulations, as a result of constantly consulting them. The democratic model implies the direct parents' involvement in the process of education and a mutual support between the two parts. Parents are part of the school activities and the didactic discourse surpasses the professional rigid frame.

I have interviewed one parent about the issues of the parents' involvement in the education process and she has given approval to the presentation of her opinions in this paper. The conclusion after the short interview was that democratic relations between teachers and parents are more and more occurrent in the Romanian education nowadays. The societal awareness of the parent involvement in the school life and about their own rights is increasing.

Consequently, the professional discourse of the teacher towards parents about the process of education in a particular school is completed now by a discourse of familiarity and equity between the two parts.



CDA in Positive Psychology. The Flow Theory

Another class instance that the present paper tackles is the classroom positive psychology. Positive psychology enhances a happy life. Csíkszentmihályi, a Hungarian psychologist has initiated the *flow* theory, based on positive psychology. Jeanne Nakamura and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describe shortly the concept of flow in their article, "The Concept of Flow" (2009). Flow is considered to be the situation or state in which people act with total involvement, which is very important because a "good life is one that is characterized by complete absorption in what one does." (Nakamura, Csikszentmihalyi 2009: 89).

.A few principles that stand at the basis of the *flow* theory have been defined: "*clear aims, immediate feedback, intense focus, correspondence between skills and challenge, transformation of time* (time passing without the person being aware of it), *merging of action and awareness, emphasis on strengths rather than of weaknesses, positive support and loss of self-consciousness*" (loss of awareness of oneself as a social actor, that is, he or she acts naturally). (Nakamura, Csikszentmihalyi, 2009).

If we transcribe the concept of flow into education and the classroom discourse, the same principles can be applied for achieving a successful teaching situation. Didactic process should be characterized by clear aims and total focus and absorption from both the teachers and the students' part, while teachers' positive reinforcement is essential.

Several professors have dealt with the flow theory in the context of education: Bassi (2012), Nakamura (2009), Jackson and Marsh (1996), Bakker (2017) or Moneta (2012). Moreover, they have considered different methods of measuring flow: through interviews, the experience sampling method (ESM), through observation, scales, etc. However, the most frequent method is the questionnaire, based on Csikszentmihalyi's model from 1988.

Procedure: the participants are given three quotations to read:

> "My mind isn't wandering. I am not thinking of something else. I am totally involved in what I am doing. My body feels good. I don't seem to hear anything. The world seems to be cut off from me. I am less aware of myself and my problems.
> My concentration is like breathing I never think of it. When I start, I really do shut out the world. I am really quite oblivious to my surroundings after I really get going. I think that the phone could ring, and the doorbell could ring or the house burn down or something like that. When I start I really do shut out the world. Once I stop I can let it back in again.
> I am so involved in what I am doing. I don't see myself as separate from what I am doing."

Participants, students in our case, have to answer questions about: 1. when and if they have experienced it, 2. how often they have experienced it, 3. what activity they were precisely doing at the moment. The questionnaire can be adapted for a specific didactic activity, too.

Another very recent method of measuring flow is the one devised by Bakker, Golub and Rijavek (2017), called The Study-Related Flow Inventory (WOLF-S), adapted from the work flow inventory. It includes thirteen items measuring absorption/concertation (4 items), class enjoyment (4 items), and intrinsic learning motivation (5 items):

> "The following statements refer to the way in which you experienced your academic work during the last two weeks. Please indicate how often you experienced each of the statements. (1=never, 2=almost never, 3=sometimes, 4=regularly, 5=often, 6=very often, 7=always).
> 1. When I am learning, I think about nothing else
> 2. I get carried away when I am learning
> 3. When I am learning, I forget everything else around me
> 4. I am totally immersed in my studying
> 5. My studying gives me a good feeling
> 6. I do my study obligations with a lot of enjoyment
> 7. I feel happy during my learning
> 8. I feel cheerful when I am learning
> 9. I would still learn even if I did not have to
> 10. I find that I also want to learn in my free time
> 11. I study because I enjoy it
> 12. I am learning for my own sake
> 13. I get my motivation from the learning itself, and not from the grades."
> (Bakker, 2017: 162)

Participants, 50 students in the 11th form at "Onisifor Ghibu" High School, Sibiu have answered this study-related flow inventory and the conclusions

are that most of them are only partly involved in the learning process, since OFTEN and SOMETIMES describe most of their answers.

As mentioned before, linguists dealing with Critical Discourse Analysis in educational contexts have referred to it as an analysis of the classroom interaction, classroom materials, the influence of various background factors, personal beliefs, etc, as presented in the subchapters II.1, II.2, II.3 of this paper. *Classroom flow* can be considered another important aspect to have in view.

Critical Discourse Analysis of any educational discourse can identify evidence of teachers' support in classroom, both teachers' verbal manifestations, as well as their social understanding of the contexts and students, which are elements of the educational *flow*.

The following instance will prove that the positive psychology can encourage a coherent, well-to-do flow of didactic discourse, while an incorrect flow of the teaching situation can determine confusion and lack of achievement of the initial objectives of the teaching process:

Teacher: Write in your notebooks the title of our next lesson: Moods and feelings!
[the didactic discourse has not presented clearly the aims of the lesson]
.Student 1: What is it about, teacher?
Teacher: You will see later.
[no immediate feedback given, thus, students may lose interest]
Student 2: Teacher, we have brought our projects today…
[no total concentration/focus]
.Teacher: Ok. Good!
[although there is supportive feedback, lack of clear goals and focus impede the teaching-learning-evaluation process]
.Student 3: I don't have it! I forgot it at home…
.Teacher: You always forget it at home…
[focus on weakness rather than on strength] etc.

Overall, CDA has to take in consideration positive psychology and the *educational flow,* too. The supportive/non-supportive feedback given by teachers and the didactic classroom process with all its basic elements: goals, absorption/concentration, merging of action and awareness, correspondence between challenge and skills, transformation of time and loss of self-consciousness are all essential.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present paper emphasizes the importance of the discourse analysis in the education field and, particularly, its relevance in the classroom interaction. Classroom interaction, impacted through written and oral didactic discourse in some special classroom instances, lead to form a new pattern of didactic discourse, reviving the old, classical one, partially.

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