

Reconceptualising a good teacher in SMART education: A Foucauldian Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract: While using technology in the classroom has been taken for granted as ‘good thing’ or ‘smart thing’, improving students learning, many teacher educators have argued teachers need to develop technology-related professionalism. Teachers have been trained to teach with technology for many years, but many teachers still seem to find the effective integration of technology in their teaching challenging and it is yet rare to see smart enough classroom practices. This research aims to understand, based on Foucault’s theoretical notions of ‘discourse’ and ‘power’, the formation of such a gap between the technology-focused educational claims and the actual reality of teachers’ educational practices. The study is situated in a specific educational context of promoting an idea of “SMART education” in South Korea. It will closely investigate a set of claims about technology, teaching, and teachers in the SMART education discourse and their construction, circulation, and influences on teachers’ practices by collecting and analysing language use in various texts. An ultimate purpose of the study is to deconstruct the taken-for-granted assumptions related to the SMART education, which seem to impose certain pedagogical ideas upon teachers, which may not support teachers’ classroom practices in reality.

1. Introduction

“We’re not that naïve to expect that we’ll be looking like a model even after buying home gym.” “Innovation in Education? I say it is innovatively rare to see any change in my classroom¹.”

Along with the rapid development of a belief that using technology is essentially a ‘good thing’ for education (Selwyn 2011:20), there has been an increasing stress on teachers’ effective integration of technology in their classroom practices. Technology-integrated education has been considered ‘innovative’ that promises learner autonomy, higher thinking ability, or collaborative learning (e.g., Kirschner & Erkens, 2006; Lim & Chai, 2004; Sanprasert, 2010; Pivec, 2007; Young, 2003). The government correspondingly invested the astronomical amounts of budgets in advancing technological infrastructure in schools in South Korea. In the U.S, the department of Education invested \$659,438,400 in an attempt to integrate technology into teaching and learning by providing professional development opportunities (Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007). In 2011, Korean government administered a new plan to invest almost the equal amount of budget allocation to implement ‘SMART education²’. It has been commonly expected that integrating new technology in education will enhance learners’ 21st century skills such as

¹ These quotes are drawn from the authors’ informal interviews with two Korean teachers conducted in order to gain some insights for developing the proposed research project in September, 2018.

² SMART education is defined as an intelligent and tailored learning system bringing changes in educational environment, contents, method and assessment for enhancing the 21st learner competences (Kim et al., 2013). The word ‘SMART’ stands for ‘Self-directed’, ‘Adaptive’, ‘Resource-enriched’, ‘Technology-embedded’. It can be interpreted as individualized, autonomous, flexible educational system based on ICT. SMART education policy was first proposed June, 2011 by Korea Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in collaboration with Presidential committee on National Informatization. Since 2012, SMART education policy has been implemented in various educational components such as digital textbooks, teacher education, SMART education pilot-schools, and etc.

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learning and innovation skills, life and career skills, information media and technology skills. That expectation has tended to underpin further suggestions: teacher professional development (here after, TPD) should be accompanied to effectively teach students with technology.

However, it is worthwhile to note that we have not yet observed such innovative changes in the most classrooms even after the excessive investments in the technology-related educational projects (e.g., building infrastructure and developing TPD programmes). It is rather unclear if it has actually brought the expected changes including students equipped with the 21st Century skills. We, as an in-service teacher and a teacher educator familiar with the Korean school context, have observed many unfortunate cases that digital devices stored in a locker in a safe room and teachers being blamed for not using them—even though they have completed all of the mandatory TPD programmes (e.g., online SMART education courses). It is clear in our mind that a small number of the so-called “best practices” in those pilot-schools, which have been strongly promoted by government are too far away from the reality, which is a starting point of this proposed study.

The study, situated in the specific educational context of promoting the SMART education in South Korea, aims to understand the formation of such a gap between the technology-focused educational claims and the actual reality of teachers’ educational practices. Based on Foucault’s theoretical framework, this study will closely investigate a set of claims about technology, teaching, and teachers in the SMART education discourse and their construction, circulation, and influences on teachers’ practices by collecting and analysing language use in various texts. An ultimate purpose of the study is to deconstruct the taken-for-granted assumptions related to the SMART education, which seem to impose certain pedagogical ideas upon teachers, which may not support teachers’ classroom practices in reality. This study may reveal as well as problematize the whole processes of the construction of ‘new’ conceptualisation of teaching and ‘good’ teachers, which may enable teachers to see the strong effects of the new conceptualisation upon their professional lives. Through the problematization, teachers could avoid of being captured by the set of taken-for-granted claims and further, be able to create a new version of truths that better support their practices. The research questions set to guide out inquiry process are:

How is a set of claims about good teachers constructed in ‘SMART education’ discourse and how do those claim shape teachers’ perceptions and practices?

- What are the taken-for-granted claims and their rhetorical strategies in the related texts about SMART education?
- What are the similarities and differences can be found among the claims in the related texts about SMART education?
- How is the set of claims intertwined to the SMART education practices?
- What are the influences of the set of claims on teachers’ perceptions and actual practices?

2. Literature Review

To tackle the stated aim, we have assembled bodies of literature that are relevant to political status of the teachers, technology use and teachers’ professional development before exploring the questions to gain what is known and what is unknown. Relevant literature will be introduced with the rationale why there is a need to look into the topics.

First, as SMART education is one of the educational policies, it seems necessary to understand how the educational policies portrait teachers and the relationship between educational policies and the political status of teachers. The literature shows that the political status of teachers is elusive. The literature shows debateable examples of the political status of the teacher in relation to governmental educational reform by reporting teachers are both passive political subjects and have the power to repel institutional regulates (Ben-peretz & Flores, 2018; Jung, 2018; Priestley et al., 2012; Taylor, 1997).

Second, as can be implied in the definition of ‘SMART education’ (see note 1), it is a learning system based on the technology use. Hence, it seems reasonable to see how technology use has been investigated. The literature shows that there is conflicting view on the effect of technology use. Some academic commentators report that it improves students' higher thinking ability or learner autonomy (see, e.g. Kirschner & Erkens, 2006; Lim &

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Chai, 2004; Sanprasert, 2010; Pivec, 2007; Young, 2003). However, there is a counter argument maintaining that tangible evidence for sustained beneficial change is elusive though many attempts to prove (Selwyn 2011:85). On the side which assumes that technology can be innovative in learning and teaching, all the literature points out that the mere adoption of technology does not automatically make learning innovative and therefore need teacher 'professionalism' (see. e.g. Blackwell, Lauricella & Wartella, 2014; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Richard, 2005; Pareja Roblin et al., 2018; Roschelle et al., 2000).

Lastly, it is worthwhile to see the literature dealing with TPD in the technology-integrated education considering the significant role of teacher in SMART education. There are normative, ideology critical, and Foucauldian approach which vary in interpreting the term 'professionalism'. Normative approach takes the term and explore the ways to enhance teachers' competence effectively and efficiently (e.g., Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007). Ideology critical approach poses a question about the term, 'professionalism', itself by arguing it is a vague and controversial concept (e.g., Abbott, 1991; Esland, 1980; Ginsburg, 1987). Although ideology critical approach recognizes the social factors and their influence on the matter of professionalism, it does not address the importance of the governing mechanism and a certain power which act as a core of producing, reproducing, and evolving strategies as well as structure of the system.

A Foucauldian approach interprets the professionalism is one of the techniques to regulate teachers and educational system. The analysis of Foucauldian approach literature in TPD shows two tendencies which reveal the hidden power and its governing strategies. Some academic commentators focus on the fact that TPD is considered as a process in implementing educational policy and becomes disciplinary system (Bourke, Lidstone & Ryan, 2015; Fenwick, 2003; Hall & Noyes, 2009; Rossi et al., 2007). The other researchers analyse a set of strategies to manage teachers and focuses on revealing the unseen power that regulates teachers as well as their resistance (Kim, 2010; Jung, 2018).

The review identifies that there has been many research investigating the political status of teacher, technology use and teacher's professionalism. However, it only can provide us partial understanding in the matter of the dynamic that SMART education, teacher education and teachers interactively creates. Further, although the 'Foucauldian approach' has the potential of rendering a beneficial perspective by focusing on the hidden power and governing principle behind what is seen, there is lack of research which investigates the power enabling production of strategies and certain social rules in relation to SMART education particularly. Therefore, this section ends by arguing that more research should be conducted to better our understanding in the area.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodological Approach

In discussing the concept, 'power', the most important concept in the Foucault's conceptual tool box would be 'discourse' and could be better understood together. Power exerts its influence on people with the regulative intention by constituting and showing a specific reality with a selective set of statements which often is regarded as knowledge and truths and vice versa. According to Foucault, 'power', as a main factor making rules or systems to be maintained, is everywhere, diffused and embodied in discourse (Foucault, 1991). 'Discourse³', as 'a more selective group of statements about a particular subject that has regulative power upon people's thoughts and behaviours (Lee, forthcoming: 5), is an instrument of power (Ball, 2013:30). At the same time, discourse, just as power produces constant dynamics in relations, allows resistance and constant change. In this sense, investigation of discourse automatically means the investigation of power. The investigation of SMART education discourse indicates that the investigation of a set of claims made in SMART education as truths and the power relations in the discourse.

This study will adopt Foucauldian Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) among many different versions of discourse studies (Lee, forthcoming; Taylor, 2004). Foucauldian CDA works to explain the relationships between language use and social structures, mediated by discursive practices based on Foucault's theory of discourse (Allan, 2013, cited in Lee, forthcoming). Moreover, by inviting new ways of seeing and asking questions about what we think we know, it can provide 'unforeseen untried possibilities in our history' (Allan 2013:31).

³ Here, the term 'discourse' should be distinguished from the general use in linguistics which are a group of sentences, conversation, a paragraph or a speech (Fendler, 2010; Lee 2017).

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This project will identify taken-for-granted claims and rhetorical strategies in the related texts about SMART education as a first step. The body of textual data will include a governmental policy document which will guide the further data collection and analysis processes. The follow-up research reports published by one of the national research institutes will be the another set of texts. These are generally the responses to government's call to embody general directions in a certain governmental policy into a form of concrete knowledge. News articles about SMART education discourse and teacher education will be also explored. It is mainly because news media are crucial to establishing the range of criteria for constructing, debating, and resolving social issues through the selection and framing of news and opinion (Domke, McCoy & Torres 1999). Next, claims in the data will be analysed separately and comparatively to fully demonstrate the construction of the target discourse as well as its limitations and contradictions. Lastly, it will review interview texts produced from teachers taking a SMART education training program. The influence of the target discourse will be examined by looking into teachers' perceptions and practices.

4. Pilot Study and Preliminary Findings

As discussed in the previous section, this project aims to analyse multiple texts related to SMART education in South Korea. Lee (forthcoming) suggests to focus on a small number of governmental documents as a starting point, which could effectively As the first step, a policy document, Smart Education Implementation Strategies (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2011) has been analysed. It is the first formal document that declare what needs to be done with the clear statements announcing the need to implement SMART education and relevant TPD programmes in school contexts.

The analysis of the text shows that the document claims that paradigm has shifted by presenting language such as frequent rhetorical use related to the image of 'movement' ('expansion', 'generation', 'proliferation' and so on). It also often refers descriptive statistic data using high figures (millions, billions, trillions) to imply that the paradigm shift is irreversible. Then, the document proposes 'SMART education' as an absolute innovative education system which meets almost every educational objective such as 'superior ICT competence of students', 'creativity and character education', 'diversified learning environment, needs' and so on. It has also identified that those claims are declared as truth in assertive rhetoric. Consequently, within the system of those claims declared as inevitable truths, it states that teachers need to be educated to be 'professional' to cope with the new learning, new learner, and new educational environment.

5. Scholarly significance of the study of work

In the era where almost everyone would not doubt technology is a good thing. This research will contribute to liberate educators by presenting how SMART education discourse regulates teachers by deconstructing a net of truths made by unquestioned claims. Further, this research is expected to expand the area of CDA research by demonstrating a way of comprehensive CDA in investigating SMART education discourse in relation to teacher education. Lastly, it will show how education is 'represented' is related to changes in society. In other words, it will call further recognition to scholars, educators and policy-makers to notice that their acts of representation can bring changes in society.

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