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Exploring the Betsy Rymes' Three-Dimensional Approach: A Review of Classroom Discourse Analysis: A Tool for Critical Reflection

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Abstract

This book review examines the 2nd edition of Betsy Rymes' *Classroom Discourse Analysis: A Tool for Critical Reflection*. It includes an outline of each chapter's content, discusses the several distinctive features of the book, and its possible contribution to educational research from a practitioner's point of view. The book has nine chapters. The first four chapters first introduce the readers to basic concepts of discourse analysis within a three-dimensional approach, and then provides techniques and strategies for recording, viewing, transcribing and analyzing classroom talk through examples, activities, and questions. From Chapter V to VIII, Rymes focuses on particular resources utilized in classroom discourse such as turn taking, contextualization, storytelling and framing. Chapter IX revisits the three dimensions of classroom discourse and discusses how such a perspective may be integrated in teaching practice with an understanding of individual communicative repertoire. Overall, the book is a how-to-book for in-service teachers who would like to resolve issues of communication in their classrooms, and develop their interaction with their students.

Keywords

Classroom Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Educational Research, Qualitative Research

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Exploring the Betsy Rymes' Three-Dimensional Approach: A Review of *Classroom Discourse Analysis: A Tool for Critical Reflection*

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In this book review I examine the 2nd edition of Betsy Rymes' Classroom Discourse Analysis: A Tool for Critical Reflection. It includes an outline of each chapter's content, discusses the several distinctive features of the book, and its possible contribution to educational research from a practitioner's point of view. The book has nine chapters. The first four chapters first introduce the readers to basic concepts of discourse analysis within a three-dimensional approach, and then provides techniques and strategies for recording, viewing, transcribing and analyzing classroom talk through examples, activities, and questions. From Chapter V to VIII, Rymes focuses on particular resources utilized in classroom discourse such as turn taking, contextualization, storytelling and framing. Chapter IX revisits the three dimensions of classroom discourse and discusses how such a perspective may be integrated in teaching practice with an understanding of individual communicative repertoire. Overall, the book is a how-to-book for in-service teachers who would like to resolve issues of communication in their classrooms and develop their interaction with their students. Keywords: Classroom Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Educational Research, Qualitative Research

This book is the second edition of Betsy Rymes' work, which was published in 2009. In this new edition of *Classroom Discourse Analysis: A Tool for Critical Reflection*, Betsy Rymes extends her theoretical understanding of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and continues to use it as a tool for research within classroom walls. The book's primary purpose is to equip teachers with a three-dimensional critical discourse analysis perspective so that they may review their own teaching practice and enhance their interaction with their students.

According to Rymes, teachers need to analyze classroom talk in a triadic way by paying attention to social and interactional contexts along with individual agency. All of these three dimensions (re)shape and are (re)shaped by classroom discourse. Through this dynamic understanding of discourse, Rymes notes that teachers will have the necessary tools to challenge the traditional ways of teaching, which perpetuate the social structure in and out of the classroom.

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In Chapter 1, Rymes provides some key definitions including discourse, critical discourse analysis, context and classroom discourse analysis. For her, classroom discourse

analysis is the critical examination of classroom language-in-use in everyday contexts on social, interactional and individual levels. She also introduces the concept of communicative repertoire as a lifelong process of accumulation of habits and norms, which both influences and is influenced by classroom interaction. Focusing on both the teacher's and the students' accrued repertoire may shed light to how certain individuals are not included in the classroom interaction.

In Chapter 2, Rymes offers a three-dimensional approach to discourse analysis: a) social context outside the classroom (societal and institutional norms), b) interactional context of a particular speech event (interactional norms), and c) individual agency (an individual's ability to understand social and interactional norms, and use them to build their own repertoire in new and different ways). For Rymes, social contexts are at play in the background, and form both the teacher's and the students' (inter)actions by framing what and how to do and say things in the classroom through their assumed and/or accepted identities of the self and the others. Despite being moderated by social norms, interactional context may lead to unpredictable directions as a result of individuals' agency to (re)shape the social structures in many creative ways.

As how-to chapters, Chapter 3 and 4 provide teachers with a manual for CDA by utilizing a three-dimensional framework. Chapter 3 caters to the first two phases of data collection. Rymes gives a detailed description of introductory techniques to capture the most important components of classroom interaction for later viewing. These techniques include where to set up the camera so as to maximize data collection in and out of the classroom (social context), and to capture verbal and non-verbal communication (interactional context and individual agency). Chapter 4 focuses on the transcription and data analysis. Rymes introduces transcription conventions and gives an example of how discourse analytical tools can be used to understand the three dimensions of classroom discourse. However, she notes that transcription is a political process in and of itself as researchers make deliberate choices while trimming away some context.

In Chapter 5, Rymes scrutinizes turn-taking patterns by demonstrating how different ways of asking questions and responding to students' answers may result in positive or negative learning outcomes. Therefore, teachers must understand both the traditional and non-traditional turn-taking patterns in classrooms (Initiation-Response-Evaluation / Initiation-Response-Feedback) in light of the three dimensions. Rymes also discusses how early language socialization before school may shape students' turn taking habits in the classroom. In any case of mismatch between the discourse in the house and in the classroom, students may have difficulty in their interactions with their teachers and their peers. Therefore, Rymes advises teachers to have the knowledge of their students' social environment outside the school so that they can develop more inclusive interactional strategies for their students.

Chapter 6 offers teachers some guidelines to analyze in-class contextualization cues, which are non-linguistic features people use to understand how words function (facial expression, pitch, volume, tone of voice, word choice, body position, and etc.). Rymes points out that the structure and the meaning of these cues may differ greatly across communities and according to individual communicative repertoires. Overall, Rymes urges teachers to adopt a cross-cultural lens to avoid, or at least mitigate misunderstandings in the classroom based on different racial, religious, gender, linguistic, and so on backgrounds.

Chapter 7 investigates how narratives contribute to classroom discourse as an interactional resource, which may be used as additional resources by teachers to encourage students' participation. Rymes remarks that students have the opportunity to share their knowledge and experiences while constructing their and others' identities through storytelling. For Rymes, however, different kinds of narratives may be received differently in different

classrooms depending on the social contexts. She then details several possible outcomes of specific styles and offers guidelines for the analysis of narratives in classroom transcripts.

Chapter 8 focuses on framing resources. According to Rymes, frames are the social and interactional contexts that influence what and how individuals do or say things. Frames may act as resources for classroom interaction when the students' framings are similar to those of their teacher; otherwise communicational challenges may arise. Therefore, Rymes points to the importance of acknowledging that framing conventions are part of individuals' communicative repertoire, so, they must be carefully analyzed to be able to enhance classroom interaction.

Chapter 9 reviews the three-dimensional approach to classroom discourse analysis along with individual communicative repertoire. Rymes asserts that by analyzing classroom discourse through this framework, teachers may understand their own teaching practice more profoundly, hence, find better ways to enhance interaction in their classroom. CDA provides teachers with the necessary tools to eliminate any potential negative outcome in favor of students so that they can think, say and act more critically without having the fear of being misunderstood, misjudged, and eventually silenced.

The book has several distinctive features. First of all, Rymes is good at incorporating theory into practice. Her three-dimensional approach illuminates every stage of classroom discourse analysis; from data collection to analysis. By understanding the social context, teachers may critically engage with their own practice from an anthropologist's point of view and come to a fuller grasp of the interaction in their classrooms. This realization may then lead to a more mindful reframing of practice including reformulating questions, and having productive dialogues. The carefully selected conversation excerpts help readers engage further with the book, making it an easier read. In short, it may be concluded that the book satisfies the readers both theoretically and practically.

On the whole, this book may be considered as a how-to book for in-service teachers who would like to develop their teaching practice. By recording and viewing their own classrooms, they may understand and diagnose the failing parts of their teaching. Later, they may find alternative ways to resolve such problems by transcribing and analyzing their interaction with students. This book is also a perfect resource for those who believe that action research is an effective way to improve teaching practice. By focusing on the contextual elements of their own styles, values and beliefs, teachers may develop a bottom-up strategy through the guidance of the book. Although Rymes would argue, I believe that the book may still be a valuable resource for self-reflection for teachers even though they do not opt for fully applying the proposed steps. Once being exposed to to-the-point examples and engaging with the carefully selected activities, teachers may still be inspired by Rymes' ideas and suggestions. Additionally, thanks to Rymes' simple yet thorough writing style, the book may also be used as a textbook for teacher education programs. Especially, the questions, activities and further reading suggestions at the end of each chapter makes it an appealing resource for pre-service teachers.

Overall, this is a well-organized book with a compelling yet simple writing style, in which Rymes has successfully incorporated theory and practice. The techniques she proposes are applicable for any content area. On top of all of its strengths lies its being a critical resource for teachers who would like to overcome the constraints of monotonous banking model of education, and who seek ways to raise students with problem solving abilities while at the same time equipping them with intercultural awareness.

References

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