The Dilemma and Reconstruction of Students' Subjectivity from the Perspective of Educational Sociology

Yang Zhao*

Guangxi Normal University, Guilin 541006, Guangxi, China

*Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.

Abstract

Student subjectivity is the core of educational reform, helping students stimulate creativity and critical thinking. The reconstruction of students' subjectivity is an inevitable requirement for educational progress. It helps respect students' individuality and freedom, adapt to the rapidly changing social demands, and cultivate innovative talents for the future society. This article explores the manifestations, predicaments, and reconstruction paths of students' subjectivity in the new era from the perspective of educational sociology. Emphasize the significance of students' subjectivity in stimulating intrinsic motivation, promoting critical thinking and creativity, and point out the restrictions on students' subjectivity imposed by the discipline existing in institutionalized education. The challenges of students' subjectivity in terms of self-actualization, social expectation pressure, and cultural identity were analyzed, and corresponding reconstruction strategies were proposed.

1. Introduction

From the perspective of educational sociology, the subjectivity of students stimulates their intrinsic motivation and promotes the cultivation of critical thinking and creativity, which is crucial for adapting to the rapidly changing social and economic environment. In educational reform, students' subjectivity is regarded as the key to improving the quality and effectiveness of education. In Erving Goffman's theory of drama, interpersonal communication is regarded as the stage, and concepts such as "on stage," "front stage," and "back stage" are proposed. People play different roles and stage different scripts in society. The front desk is a place of control regulated by systems and norms. The essence of the front desk is discipline [1,2]. In daily school life, the classroom is "on stage," and students are the actors performing on the stage. Students' behaviors in the classroom belong to "front stage" behaviors, and they are constantly "disciplined" by the "on stage." What institutionalized education cannot avoid is the constant

discipline of students, and this discipline even spreads to the "backstage" of students' daily lives. Therefore, the reconstruction of students' subjectivity under the educational background of the new era has become an urgent problem to be solved.

2. The value of reconstructing students' subjectivity from the perspective of educational sociology in the new era

2.1. The self-awakening of students' subjectivity

The self-awakening of students' subjectivity is a crucial step in education. Education is not merely the imparting of knowledge but also the awakening of students' souls. Under the background of exam-oriented education, students are imprisoned by schools that overly emphasize intellectual education, losing their freedom and creative souls. The only noble purpose of education is to protect the development of individuals and help them become human beings [3]. Education in the new era should be based on the individual development needs of students and enable their subjectivity to reach self-awakening.

Furthermore, educators play an important role in promoting the self-awakening of students' subjectivity. Teachers in the new era should be committed to providing students with a learning environment that is both supportive and challenging, encouraging them to question, scrutinize, and critically reflect while offering necessary resources and guidance to help students develop self-awareness and self-efficacy. The education system should transform from the traditional authoritative teaching model to a more democratic, open, and interactive one to promote the development of students' subjectivity.

2.2. Student subjectivity and social shaping

The subjectivity of students is inseparable from the shaping of society as a whole. From the perspective of educational sociology, students are not only active learners of knowledge but also participants and shapers of social culture. On the one hand, students learn basic knowledge and skills at school, actively shaping themselves and promoting their development. On the other hand, their daily activities also influence the shaping of society. For instance, students participate in social practice activities and volunteer services in their spare time and actively engage in social construction. Students in schools and society do not exist in isolation; instead, they promote and develop together through mutual influence.

The education system, while cultivating students' subjectivity, also shoulders the responsibility of shaping society. Education should not merely impart "legal culture" to students but should expand from the basis of book knowledge to cultivate students' sense of social responsibility and civic awareness. Education can provide students with a platform to explore themselves, express their opinions, and realize their self-worth, which helps them form an independent personality and the ability to participate in society, enabling them to become a force that can positively influence social change.

2.3. Student subjectivity and cultural integration

Student subjectivity plays the role of a bridge in cultural integration. It not only reflects the adaptation and development of individuals in a multicultural background but also is a key force promoting cultural exchange and integration. In the context of globalization, the cultivation of students' subjectivity has become particularly important. The subjectivity of students enables them to actively explore and learn different cultural knowledge and develop cross-cultural understanding and respect. The cultural capital that students acquire through education enables them to find their place in a multicultural environment and promotes dialogue and cooperation among different cultures at the same time.

Education plays a crucial role in promoting students' subjectivity and cultural integration. Educational content and methods should reflect cultural diversity and provide students with opportunities to come into contact with and experience different cultures. International education exchange programs, multicultural festival activities, interdisciplinary cultural studies courses, and other educational practice projects can not only enhance students' cultural awareness but also cultivate their global vision and international competitiveness.

3. Manifestation of students' subjectivity from the perspective of educational sociology in the new era

3.1. The enhancement of student autonomy

Although the disciplinary power of the school system has a certain suppressive effect on the development of students' subjectivity, in the actual classroom, students do not accept it completely passively. Instead, they display their subjectivity in various ways. In traditional exam-oriented education, students' attitudes towards exam-oriented subjects and non-exam-oriented subjects are often different. Through comparison, it is found that in the study of non-examination subjects, students are more capable of questioning and discussing knowledge and actively participating in meaning construction. This kind of behavior indicates that students are active learners who actively construct meaning based on their knowledge and experience. The educational process is, first and foremost, a process of spiritual growth, and only then does it become part of the process of scientific acquisition [4–6]. Therefore, the national basic education curriculum reform should focus on correcting the complexity, difficulty, bias, and outdated nature of the curriculum content, guiding students' spiritual growth, facilitating the strengthening of students' autonomy, and advocating students' active participation and willingness to explore [7,8].

Apart from the classroom, students' autonomy is also manifested in various forms in daily life. "Backstage" is a place opposite to the "on stage." In a school, "backstage" can be dormitories, playgrounds, and other places. "Backstage" is an institutionalized gap at the junction of various controls and is also the place that is most easily overlooked. In "backstage," it is more about the display of students' subjectivity and the free development of their souls. Without the constraints of "on stage," students are no longer actors who dress up smartly and cater to the audience on the stage.

3.2. The enhancement of student innovation

The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China points out that "we should comprehensively improve the quality of independently cultivated talents and focus on fostering top-notch innovative talents," emphasizing the importance of "innovation" [9]. In the current education system, the improvement of students' innovation is the key to adapting to future social and economic development. This requires the educational model to shift from traditional knowledge indoctrination to cultivating students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. By introducing interactive teaching methods such as project-based learning and inquiry-based learning, students are encouraged to actively explore, practice, and innovate. Max Weber once said, "When a scientific worker expresses his value judgment, it is the end of his full understanding of the facts [10]." In classroom teaching, teachers should give students the freedom to think and let them take the initiative in making value judgments. Student subjectivity is the foundation of innovation because only when students can explore and learn independently can they freely exert their creativity and put forward new viewpoints and solutions [11,12].

3.3. The enhancement of students' practical awareness

Under the educational background of the new era, the enhancement of students' practical awareness has become an important trend in educational development. This enhanced sense of practice is not only related to the improvement of students' personal abilities but also a direct reflection of society's expectations for educational achievements. The education system is increasingly emphasizing the combination of theoretical knowledge and practical operation, encouraging students to apply the knowledge they have learned to solve practical problems through experiments, internships, and project practices, thereby enhancing their practical abilities.

Meanwhile, students actively participate in community services and social practices. By participating in volunteer services, community building, environmental protection, and other projects, students can directly confront social issues and learn how to apply their knowledge and skills to contribute to the community. This kind of participation not only enhances students' practical skills but also cultivates their empathy and sense of social responsibility. In their spare time from daily life and study, students' active participation in social practice is precisely a manifestation of their subject consciousness. This kind of initiative represents the transformation of students from passively accepting knowledge to actively

exploring and practicing, marking the awakening of students' subjectivity. By participating in social practice, students can better understand the significance of learning, combine their personal development with social needs, and thus achieve the unity of self-worth and social value. By enhancing their practical awareness, students can better adapt to the future work and social environment and become compound talents with innovative spirit and social responsibility.

4. The dilemma of students' subjectivity expression from the perspective of educational sociology in the new era

4.1. The problem of students' subjectivity and self-actualization

From the perspective of educational sociology in the new era, the core of students' subjectivity lies in the ability for individual self-actualization. Self-actualization refers to the state in which an individual achieves personal growth and meets their inner needs in the process of recognizing themselves, developing themselves, and realizing their potential. However, students face various challenges in the process of self-actualization. Firstly, the ambiguity of self-awareness may lead students to lack a clear understanding of their abilities and interests, thus making it difficult for them to determine appropriate learning goals and career paths. Secondly, the difficulty in setting goals can make students feel lost when planning for the future, lacking direction and motivation to move forward. Although career development planning courses are widely offered in schools at present, they still cannot provide students with a detailed understanding of various future careers. Furthermore, the lack of self-efficacy will weaken students' confidence and perseverance when facing challenges and affect their ability to solve problems and overcome difficulties. Low self-identity among students leads to low self-efficacy. These are all the influences brought by the implicit shaping of the surrounding environment on students, jointly affecting the process of students' self-actualization.

4.2. The pressure of students' subjectivity and social expectations

The pressure of social expectations has a huge impact on students' subjectivity and invisibly brings an indelible influence on all aspects of students' lives. These pressures are the key factors affecting the development of students' subjectivity. The number of university graduates has been increasing year by year. According to data from the Ministry of Education and the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of graduates from regular institutions of higher learning across the country reached 11.58 million in 2023, and it is expected to reach 11.79 million in 2024, an increase of 210,000 compared with the previous year. The large-scale increase in graduates has led to greater employment pressure. The phenomenon of "intra-competition" among students is becoming increasingly fierce. The subjectivity of students is moving towards instrumentalism, self-alienation, and homogenization in the process of "intra-competition." In the process of pursuing grade point averages and scores, students may lose themselves and become tools expected by the education system and society. Students are filled with anxiety about their future employment situation and personal development. With a large number of college graduates each year, the employment reality is far from the employment expectations, which leads to college students being full of anxiety about employment and the future. In this situation, the development of students' subjectivity is in crisis. Students cannot escape the influence of the social environment and remain unscathed; they can only get trapped in endless involution and internal consumption. This kind of subjective cognitive anxiety at the spiritual level makes the group of college students feel confused and anxious when seeking their subjectivity in a diversified environment.

4.3. The challenges of students' subjectivity and cultural identity

With the deepening of globalization, teenagers are increasingly exposed to online culture and foreign cultures, which leads to a weakening trend in their identification with Chinese traditional culture. This weakening of cultural identity not only reduces teenagers' understanding and respect for their local culture but may also affect their values and behavioral patterns, thereby influencing the normal ecology of students' subjective development. According to the survey, it can be seen that the challenges of students' subjectivity and cultural

identity are mainly reflected in maintaining national cultural subjectivity in cross-cultural communication under the background of globalization [13]. As cultural inheritors and innovators, students' awareness of cultural subjectivity includes cultural confidence, critical choice, and integrated creation. The challenge lies in how to respect multiculturalism while strengthening the identification with one's own national culture in order to cultivate students with cross-cultural communication skills. The challenge of students' subjectivity to cultural identity occurs frequently, which affects not only the formation of teenagers' sense of social responsibility but also their cultural identity.

5. The reconstruction path of students' subjectivity from the perspective of educational sociology in the new era

5.1. Cultivate intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy to promote self-actualization

Educators play an indispensable role in promoting the development of students' subjectivity and self-actualization. By offering personalized teaching methods, educators can design teaching plans based on students' specific needs, making the learning process more in line with students' interests and ability levels, thereby enhancing learning efficiency and quality. In terms of helping students build confidence, educators can provide positive feedback and encouragement to enable students to experience a sense of achievement in successful experiences and enhance their sense of self-efficacy. Clarifying personal goals is crucial for students' self-actualization. Educators can provide career planning guidance to help students explore their career interests and future development directions and set practical and feasible goals.

Furthermore, stimulating students' intrinsic motivation is one of the important tasks of educators. Educators should be committed to providing students with courses and teaching that can stimulate and cultivate their intrinsic motivation. By creating a challenging and participatory learning environment, educators can arouse students' curiosity and desire to explore, enabling them to generate the motivation to learn from the bottom of their hearts and thus better master knowledge and develop

various abilities. Mental health education is also an important means to help students overcome obstacles to self-actualization. Educators can provide psychological counseling and stress management skills to help students deal with the pressure in their studies and lives and maintain a good mental state. In future educational reform, it is necessary to attach importance to and protect the subjectivity of students, liberate education from examinations, and expand the space for nurturing people, that is, to strengthen the nurturing function and weaken the screening function.

5.2. Balance personal goals with social roles to meet social expectations

In the process of balancing personal goals and social roles to adapt to social expectations, the reconstruction path needs to start with changing the family's perception, assisting the family in perceiving the source of the autonomy crisis, reshaping the relationship, and empowering growth. In this process, the intervention of school social work is particularly important. Through three stages of changing cognition, reshaping relationships, and empowering growth, students cope with the pressure caused by social expectations [14,15].

First of all, changing family perception is the foundation. The family has a profound influence on the values and behavioral patterns of teenagers. Parents need to realize that respecting their children's autonomy and individual development is the key to helping them adapt to social expectations. Through the improvement of family education, teenagers' cultural awareness and cultural confidence can be enhanced, thus maintaining their identification with the local culture in the face of the impact of globalization. Secondly, reshaping the relationship between family and school and establishing a supportive environment is of vital importance for the individual growth of students. School social work intervention, through professional psychological counseling and guidance, helps students deal with the pressure related to social expectations while promoting communication between students and parents and creating a more harmonious family atmosphere. Finally, empowering growth means enhancing students' sense of self-efficacy and autonomy. The education system should provide a platform where students can find their

own "voices" in interactions with others and develop the ability of independent thinking and critical thinking. This kind of empowerment not only helps students form a solid cultural identity but also enables them to maintain their subjectivity when facing social expectations, thereby finding their position in the highly competitive environment and realizing their self-worth.

6. Conclusion

The perspective of educational sociology reveals the constraints of institutionalized educational discipline on students' subjectivity. The current predicament is mainly manifested as three contradictions: there is cognitive ambiguity and efficacy deficiency at the level of self-actualization; Social expectation pressure triggers employment anxiety and self-alienation. Cultural identity is confronted with the alienation of local culture under the impact of globalization. The reconstruction of the path requires strengthening intrinsic motivation through personalized teaching to help students break through discipline. Balance personal development with social demands and weaken the screening function of education. Furthermore, in multicultural education, we should consolidate the cultural foundation and cultivate critical cultural integration capabilities. Ultimately, education should transcend the logic of discipline and return to its essence of "awakening the soul," focusing on building an educational ecosystem that respects students' individuality, empowers their active growth, and liberates their creative potential in order to cultivate future talents who possess autonomy, innovation, and a sense of social responsibility.

References

[1]   Zheng J, 2007, Research on Teacher-Student Communication Quality in Vocational Schools, thesis, East China Normal University.

[2]   Zheng J, 2007, Teacher's Quality in Communication Between Teachers and Students in Vocational Colleges. Research on Education Development, 2007(2): 67–69.

[3]   Liu Y, 2001, Sociology of School Life. Nanjing Normal University Press, Nanjing.

[4]   Jaspers K, 1991, What Is Education. SDX Joint Publishing Company, Beijing.

[5]   Shi X, 2016, Combining Theory and Practice: A Study on Educational Thought, thesis, South China University of Technology.

[6]   Shi Z, 2006, The Logic of Educational Practice. Educational Research, 2006(1): 3–9.

[7]   Liu Y, 2016, The Limits of Freedom: Re-examining the Legitimacy of Education. Peking University Education Review, 14(2): 27–62 + 188–189.

[8]   Wu D, 2009, Reflections on Education Under the Perspective of Complexity Theory, thesis, Shaanxi Normal University.

[9]   Zhu L, Chen Z, Ou M, 2023, Changing Concepts and Strengthening Empowerment: Simultaneously Promoting High-Quality and Full Employment for Graduates. China University Students Career Guide, 2023(5): 3–7 + 40.

[10] Weber M, 2016, Science as a Vocation & Politics as a Vocation. SDX Joint Publishing Company, Beijing.

[11] Huang J, 2024, The Dilemma and Breakthrough of Student Subjectivity in Educational Digitization. Journal of Hebei University (Philosophy and Social Science), 49(6): 137–146.

[12] Dai L, Zhu Z, 2023, The Logical Starting Point, Goal Orientation and Action Path of the Digital Transformation of Education. Chinese Journal of Education, 2023(7): 14–20.

[13] Liu L, Chen F, 2012, Cultivating University Students' Cultural Subjectivity Consciousness in Cross-Cultural Communication: Based on Ideological and Political Education in Universities. Education Theory and Practice, 32(6): 38–40.

[14] Ma J, Zou W, 2019, On Schools and Their Functions. Tsinghua Journal of Education, 40(4): 23–31.

[15] Zhu W, 2019, On the Ethics of School Organization and Its Construction. Modern Basic Education Research, 2019(1): 209–214.

Publisher's note

Whioce Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.