

# *A Review of the Evolution of Preschool Teacher Authority*

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**Abstract:** The change of preschool teachers' authority has always been influenced by different perspectives on the purpose of education, that is, the value orientation factors of social standard and child standard. At the same time, there are some long-term disputes caused by the reality gap between the internal professional level of preschool teachers and the external society's expectations of them. "Reduction theory" and the "reinforcement theory" point out different aspects of the problem from different perspectives. The research depth caused by the debate is beneficial to the revision and development of theory and practice.

## 1. Introduction

It has been said that the authority of preschool teachers is the continuation of the traditional teacher power, which reflects the excessive control of teachers over children and should be dispelled as soon as possible. It is also said that the authority of preschool teachers needs to be rationally reconstructed in the modern context [1][2]. Therefore, the authority of teachers has also undergone the dismantling of postmodernism and then been projected into the field of preschool education and repeatedly reshaped. Preschool teaching, in China, is often regarded as a profession with unequal pay and return, which is why the discussion on the authority of preschool teachers needs attention. They should not be left to taste the sweet and bitter of work, but also burdened with the public's incomprehension of them, so that they have to wonder about the trial and error of the forward [3]. This is not only unfair to the preschool teachers, but also irresponsible to the children.

Although the authority of preschool teachers is a micro theoretical problem in the field of teacher-student relationship, it involves every individual in the public life of preschool education, and even affects the emotional tone and organizational form of practical activities in preschool education [4]. Therefore, it is not an empty talk that can be laughed off to think about where the authority of the subjectivity of preschool teachers should go. In the face of the emerging and old problems in the new era, the research on the authority of preschool teachers should be based on its own core, uphold the principle of neither excessive criticism nor blind following, and calmly analyze the existing research conclusions on the authority of teachers. Through the dispute between the "reduction theory" and the "reinforcement theory" [5], this study aims to find the real educational phenomenon and educational problems that hidden behind, and finally follows the logic of preschool education and the ultimate value of education, and seeks a win-win road for the authority of preschool teachers and the development of children.

## 2. The Debate between the Reduction Theory and the Reinforcement Theory

Teacher authority is not a new problem, but it is still a controversial issue. Some researchers start from the theoretical aspects of educational authority, while others start from the practical problems. In general, there are two main research orientations on teacher authority [6]. On the one hand, most of this kind of studies refer to the theory of the relationship between knowledge and power of Foucault, deeply analyze the dominance of power over knowledge in real education and the resulting dominance over learners, and focus on analyzing and criticizing the power relationship in education [7]. Taking the research of Chinese scholars as an example, some people believe that the alliance between knowledge and power is still prevalent in modern education in China due to the influence of traditional official ideology [8]. The factors contributing to all this are both the continuation of history and the catalyst of modern civilization. The analysis results of this kind of research tend to regard the illegitimate forces dominating the discourse power of education and the negative power (authority) of teachers as the forces that need to be eliminated [9]. This conclusion is undoubtedly partly true. However, the unilateral overemphasis on this conclusion tends to lead to the problem that all powers in education, including teacher authority, are treated as negative and illegitimate factors without distinction [10]; Brandishing the long whip of postmodernism, it destroys, deconstructs, negates and abandons the vast system, objective basis, consistency, causality and so on of modern theory. The result is that the negative factors that may exist completely cover the whole field of vision of teacher authority research, so that the guiding authority of teachers is forced to be in a situation of aphasia, and the legitimate authority of education and teachers is also threatened by deconstruction [1]. Although the dissipation of teacher authority is not only caused by this one reason, it cannot be ruled out that it plays an important role.

In the face of the coming wave of cutbacks, the continuous denunciation of the authority of teachers has finally aroused the concern of another part of scholars. These researchers think and study teachers' authority in a different way. They jump out of the framework of knowledge and power to find the necessary and reasonable factors of the education system itself and the reasonable authority that teachers should have [11]. For example, when Roberson, R. [12] studied and analyzed the relationship between knowledge and power, he also acknowledged the inevitable restrictive power of school education, which is the original component of the learning process of formal education. Graça et al. [13] expounds the legitimacy and rationality of the existence of educational power from the perspective of public life. He believes that the binding force of educational power is also an educational strength, and its rationality comes from the educatees and their educational collective life. This educational power is the condition for the existence of educational life. Some researchers analyze the characteristics of education from the two aspects of power and right, and propose that education has the character of power and right [14]. They argue that education must also have a certain tendency to power, otherwise educational activities may not go on [15]. In addition, many teachers in the front line of teaching also issued a voice to safeguard the authority of teachers, from the level of their educational experience to discuss the significance and necessity of education power and teacher authority, and expressed concerns that the two are being reduced and weakened [16].

To sum up, the research on teacher authority can summarize two research ideas: One is to regard teacher authority in education as a negative and controlling force that needs to be removed, and they regard teacher authority as a factor contrary to children's free development, which should be excluded from the basic form of education [17]. On the other hand, some researchers break through the total denial of teachers' authority, see the importance of its existence, and put forward statements to strengthen teachers' authority [18]. So if you think about it, all radical and moderate ideas and explorations are historically positive. Of course, there is no need to avoid or fear the

challenges or doubts from the outside world, because the dispute, collision and long-term coexistence of various interpretations have promoted the deepening of human understanding of education and teachers' authority [19].

If we jump out of the limitation of the real space, put our eyes on the time dimension, and analyze the real face of teacher authority with the span between history and future, the coexistence and tension between authority reduction and authority expansion behind the "reduction theory" and "reinforcement theory" actually reflect three entangled educational phenomena and problems [20]. That is, the breeding of educational violence, the vacancy of teacher authority and the dilemma of positive teacher authority.

The authority of the teacher is a rather ancient existence, a natural authority that seems to have been introduced from the beginning of the teaching profession. However, in recent years, the abuse of authority by teachers has led to educational violence, which has undoubtedly caused many people to discuss the limits of teachers' authority [21]. One of the most representative studies is the one advocating the reduction of teacher authority [22]. Faced with the distorted teacher authority caused by the implementation of educational violence, they come to the conclusion that because knowledge is power, education is a reincarnation of knowledge and power, and teacher authority is given to educators by the state or government under a certain ideology, it is an inescapable constraint for individuals in education [23]. They also point out that authority is a repressive force, and teacher authority is a privilege possessed by educators, often regarded as a means of education that can be used at will, even in the form of violence, and is an element that needs to be removed from the relationship between teachers and students. They hope to solve the problems of oppression or arrogation of freedom in education by denying the authority of teachers and generally identifying the authority of teachers as the existence that must be deconstructed [22].

Although these ideas have some reasonable elements, they also reveal their lack of comprehensive thinking on some deep theoretical problems. For example, in education, is any kind of restrictive behavior unreasonably violent? The answer is unequivocally no, which requires a distinction between educational violence and legitimate teacher authority [22]. In the concrete implementation of teacher authority, certain restrictions or even punishments may be required, which is inevitable for the realization of educational goals and the maintenance of public life. Education, therefore, by its very nature does not preclude the use of coercion in certain circumstances, as Plato, Kant, Locke, etc., have shown, but this necessary coercion is by no means equivalent to violence. Because the coercive means in the case of necessity does not go against the nature of human nature, but is an effective means to prevent human nature from becoming corrupt. Because the means of restriction in the case of necessity are not contrary to the nature of human nature, but are effective means to prevent children's thoughts and actions from going astray [24].

Unfortunately, the existence of violence in education and negative teacher authority has made people suspicious and hostile to any kind of power in education, and any restrictions are resisted as an erosion of the free development of children [25][26]. This leads to the atrophy of the original educational power, that is, the teacher's authority is blindly set aside. The guidance and discipline that should exist in education are in a state of silence, and there is only pure transmission and reception of knowledge and information between educators and learners [7]. The moral and emotional communication between teachers and children has also become cautious, not to mention the guidance of higher levels of personality and values, which will eventually lead to the public life of education being empty and soulless [27]. In addition, there is also a point that is more easily ignored by people, the teacher authority overhead and the breeding of educational violence are actually symbiotic. The generation of violence has destroyed the space for the existence of positive teacher authority, and some experienced preschool teachers have become confused under a large number of outside voices. The violence of education corrupts the authority of teachers, and the

emptiness of the authority of teachers in turn leaves enough space for the breeding of the violence of education [28]. The combination of the two makes the authority of teachers appear in a kind of contradictory and distorted state. What's worse, the reduction theory often categorizes the reasonable authority of teachers as the objects to be reduced without regard to the enemy or self, so the authority that is suspended becomes more and more weak, forcing teachers to rely more and more on educational violence to maintain their daily educational work [26], which will eventually lead to educational violence and negative authority filling the education in the long run.

At the same time, while educational theorists and practitioners criticize the negative teacher authority in the reality of education, they also ignore that the reasonable and appropriate teacher authority also needs us to leave enough living space for it, so that the positive teacher authority is suspended and even eliminated in the conflict of educational violence and the boost effect of teacher authority nihilism [29][30]. The root of the error is to regard authority only as a purely negative factor, or to see only the negative side of authority [31]. As a result, teachers have unknowingly entered a vicious circle: Because of the emergence of improper teacher authority and the influence of educational violence, the voice of teacher authority nihilism is becoming increasingly loud, which is not only useless to solve the dilemma and urgent problems encountered by the actual teacher authority, but also encourages the breeding of educational violence and occupies the space that the reasonable teacher authority should have [32]. In order to recover the rightful authority of the teachers, "reinforcement theory" came into being. According to the interpretation of reinforcement theory, there can not be no teacher authority in education, and there is only a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate [33]. The existence of legitimate teachers' authority is conducive to resisting and eliminating the abuse and expansion of illegitimate teachers' authority. The loss of positive teachers' authority directly or indirectly leads to the publicity of improper teachers' authority. Therefore, maintaining reasonable teacher authority is equivalent to blocking the generation and expansion of unreasonable authority [34]. Therefore, using reasonable teacher authority to oppose improper teacher authority can protect teacher authority to maintain its positive role and safeguard the justice of education.

### **3. True Purpose: Children's Development and Preschool Teachers' Authority Together to Win**

Freedom and authority may seem like natural enemies, but freedom is a mental attitude, not just freedom to act without external constraints [35]. Therefore, excessive criticism of teachers' authority, like the reduction theory, will also lead to another problem in the preschool education stage, that is, it may lead to some preschool teachers directly, simply and roughly giving up the desire to exercise their own authority because of external criticism and pressure [36]. The result may not only fail to fundamentally solve the problem, but also hinder the reasonable and orderly development of children, and ultimately destroy the integrity of children's own freedom [37]. Montesquieu once said, "Freedom is only: a man can do what he ought to do, and not be forced to do what he ought not to do." However, incomplete and imperfect development, how can support a person to do what he should do? Yasbales emphasized that authority is not power, nor is it simple power without the connotation of authority. He does not put authority in an absolute position, but talks about authority in combination with freedom, and believes that true freedom and legitimate authority are interdependent [38]. Therefore, the legitimate authority of preschool teachers and children's free development is not a zero-sum game [39]. On the contrary, authority urges preschool teachers to better protect children's development and freedom through correct theoretical concepts and excellent professional ability while improving their own literacy level, promote children's interests, protect children's basic education rights from infringement, and promote children's healthy

development [38]. The two are a unified whole. Safeguarding children's free and comprehensive development is not only the requirement and goal of authority implementation, but also the inner motivation for preschool teachers to identify and follow proper authority [40].

It is undeniable that how to grasp the tension between authority and children's independent development is a challenge for every preschool teacher. Only when a preschool teacher steps out of school into society can he or she truly enter the polishing of the cause of preschool education [40]. Therefore, in the interaction with children in the education process, preschool teachers can make full use of the practical experience materials provided by the work, integrate the fragmented experience in a structured way, focus on increasing real talent and learning, constantly accept the practical experience to arm, nourish and edify, and deepen the understanding of their own authority. In this way, the work of preschool education will become a huge furnace of re-education, re-learning and re-promotion [41].

#### 4. Conclusions

In this era of great material abundance and geometric leaps in science and technology, mankind is experiencing everything that has never been experienced before. In the new era, the authority of preschool teachers is often faced with new situations and new changes. Postmodern theory holds that educational authority is the result of the transfer of a part of social power, and social power is often born with a certain ideological color, so the teacher authority derived from educational authority seems doomed to be unable to get rid of the ideological shadow of the society in which it is located. Although the above is indeed a "part" that cannot be ignored in the authority of preschool teachers, it is only a part of it, not all. Because any subsystem in the social system, including education, has its own unique values and rules, and it can operate without being in a crisis by adhering to its values and rules. And preschool teachers also need to find their own position between truth and reality; Know your place; Keep your position; Worthy of this position. Preschool teachers must not only find a place for their authority, but also find a place to use it as the first driving force to ensure that children's freedom and development are continuous in time and space.

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