

Course : Educational Psychology

Level : Third Year License

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Lecture5: Teacher's Powers in the Classroom

The notion “power” is usually related to communication. If we do not communicate the power, then the power does not exist. In this regard, McCorsky (1978) claims that: “there is a difference between knowing and teaching and that difference is communication in the classroom” (p.32).

Definition of Power: is making somebody change his/her behavior due to that power and according to it. The behavior should be a direct outcome of that specific power that has been exerted e.g., a student may change his/her behavior according to the teacher's code of discipline. McCorsky and Richmond (1983) said that “power is the individual's potentials to have an effect on another person's or group of persons' behavior “

In addition, French and Raven(1968) claim that “ the power depends on the perception of people over whom the power is exerted”. Accordingly, teacher's power depends on students' perception of the power. If students do not perceive the power, it does not exist and the teacher is powerless .e.g., if students perceive that the teacher has power, they will act according to it and change their behaviour.

Teachers Powers: There exist five (5) types of teacher's powers in the classroom to be explained as follows:

1. Coercive Power: it depends on the students' perception that the teacher has the ability to punish them. Thus, they will obey and act according to that power to avoid being punished. This form of power is important to draw lines and boundaries. It helps promote a sense of security in the classroom for those students who are well behaved and disciplines, and count on the teacher to discipline those who tend to misbehave.

2. Reward Power: the students' perception that the teacher is able to provide rewards if they do what the teacher demands. It includes grades, recognition, prizes, praise, privileges and anything else that the students desire and to be given to them externally by the teacher.

3. Legitimate Power: By virtue of the fact that the teacher is in the position of "the teacher" who has power. The role of teacher assumes that they have power. There is no other person in the classroom that can fulfill the duties of the teacher.

4. Referent Power: When the teacher is perceived to have good personality traits, care for relationship building, or share common interests with students. Referent or attractive power results from the fact that the teacher has a personality that is perceived by the students as pleasing, such as being likeable, funny or charming. Thus, students would want to follow and respect those that have qualities that are judged "cool".

5. Expert power: When the teacher is perceived as being knowledgeable in the subject, well prepared, and intelligent, he possesses the expert power. Students modify their learning as a response to it and sometimes a change in their behavior may occur as a result of effective teaching.

The Communication of the power:

The powers of the teacher are to be associated with the requested behaviours by students through experience and/or accommodation. Each student perceives the power in his/ her own way, which means that the teacher could be either powerful or powerless according to students' perception. However, sometimes, perception of the power exists, but the students may not react according to it (resist it). In this case, the power does not exist.

Teachers' and Students' Perception of the Powers' Use

Teachers are always positive and have a positive attitude towards their teaching powers. While **Students** do not like the power of the teacher because they are the ones under its influence. In this regard, McCroskey and Richmond (1983) claim that students will respond in the classroom on the basis of how they perceive the classroom to be, not the

basis of how their teacher perceives it. Therefore, students' perceptions are the direct precursors of their classroom behaviors.

Powers Use and Students Learning

Students learning can be either cognitive or affective:

1. **Cognitive:** It includes content knowledge and the development of intellectual skills : knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation .
2. **Affective:** it includes feelings, values, appreciation, and motivation towards the knowledge.

1. **Coercive and legitimate power** are negatively associated with the students' cognitive and affective learning and may reduce their outcomes.

Reasons:

Coercive Power is characterized by threatening the students

Legitimate Power would make students feel oppressed or dominated

2. **Referent and expert power** were found to be positively associated with affective and cognitive leaning. i.e. when they are used frequently, learning enhances .

Reasons:

Referent Power is characterized by the teacher's attempts to establish a good relationship with students

Expert's Power is characterized by the expertise and the knowledge of the teacher which is appreciated by the students.

3. **The reward power** is found to be non-influential for both learning styles

Reasons:

The learner is simply doing the thing that he is asked to do just to get something that is not needed "extra". The kind of motivation created is not for the sake of learning but for the sake of the reward only.

Conclusion

The use of teacher's powers is crucial for the teaching/learning process. However, some powers may affect the learning process negatively. The overuse of the coercive power affects learners negatively and hinders learning, while the use of reward power will help establish the referent power. Therefore, The teacher should minimize the use of coercive and legitimate powers and maximize the use of expert and referent powers so that both cognitive and affective learning increase.

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