Tracing the Discourse of Autonomy around the Education Reform of the 1990s in Korea: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this study was to explore the autonomy of the May 31st education reform of 1995 in Korea. The author used critical discourse analysis, and found that the discourse of autonomy in Korean education reform was to create a free market for education services. The discourse of autonomy replaced the discourse of deregulation. Use of the term autonomy might be used to mask the reality of a deregulated, fully marketed education system resulting from neoliberal education reform.

Keywords: autonomy, deregulation, discourse, critical discourse analysis, education reform

Ⅰ. Introduction

Over the past two decades, South Korea has been involved in education reform. The education reform of 1995 (hereafter “the May 31st reform”) specifically was a turning point in Korean education. Although four changes of government occurred in Korea after the May 31st reform proposals were published, education reform has been implemented quite consistently. In spite of the regime changes, every new government proclaimed an intent to implement and develop the May 31st reform proposals. Considering that many other social policies shifted after the changes of government, it was very unusual that the education policies did not, despite the government changes. Almost all of the education policy changes in Korea after the year 1995 were merely annotations of the May 31st reform program.

It was the term autonomy that symbolized the May 31st education reform. After the reform proposals were unveiled, the term autonomy was used as a kind of panacea – it was unveiled as a tool intended to make Korean education improve drastically. As a result, many Koreans expected the majority of problems caused by Korean education to be resolved thanks to this autonomy. Furthermore, autonomy was applauded as a mechanism with the potential to raise the quality of education and diversify Korean education (Kim, 2008). Autonomy was more frequently used in conjunction with accountability in these reform documents, yet, autonomy is still one of the most important terms that Korean education policymakers use when they state policy goals today.

However, several years ago, some Korean education professionals began to raise serious questions about the school autonomy policy (insert citation). This trend increased in 2008 when school autonomy policies were again announced by the Formal Minister of Education, Joo-Ho Lee. Other-directed school autonomy policies were criticized by some professionals (J. C. Kim, 2011; Y. Kim, 2011). Even autonomy policies that were implemented uniformly and with fidelity did not escape criticism (Lee, 2008). Instead of being seen as enhancing
the autonomy of teachers, the autonomy policies were criticized for shrinking school autonomy (Kim & Katsuno, 2012). The number of professionals who agree with Whitty and colleagues (1998), who argued that devolution is often utilized to blame for failure, not for freedom to succeed, increased as autonomy was combined more and more with accountability.

What made the evaluation of the discourse of autonomy change dramatically in Korean education policy? One way to approach this problem is using a policy implementation study. The cause of this change in the discourse of autonomy may be further explored by centering on the attitude or ability of policy implementers, or the changes in the political environment concerned with the school autonomy policy (Chung, 2008). In this study, however, the author assumed that the seeds of such a change were already present in the discourse of autonomy itself. Because of this assumption, the problem was not approached as an implementation problem. Instead, the reality that school autonomy policy was considerably different from the expectations that many teachers and education researchers had imagined after the May 31st education reform was explored.

A. Critical Discourse Analysis

Language has long been viewed as a set of social practices that makes it possible for people to create a meaningful world of individuals and things. Especially in the critical studies of Western Marxian tradition, almost every important social phenomenon has been criticized, as well as analyzed, through a lens that views language as inseparable from power. For example, Marx and Engels (1976) define ideology as a system of ideas that distort reality in order to serve the dominant group and a means of penetrating the consciousness of human actors. For the researchers, ideology is inseparable from language and meaning. Hegemony, a term used by Gramsci (Forgacs, 1988), emphasizes forms of power that depend on consent, not on coercion. The hegemony of the dominant social class depends upon gaining the consent (or at least acquiescence) of the majority to existing social arrangements. Hegemonies are sustained ideologically, that is in the ‘common sense’ assumptions of everyday life (Forgacs, 1988). Althusser (1971), the French Marxist philosopher, saw ideologies as positioning people in particular ways as social subjects. According to him, language plays a key role in constructing subjects ideologically.

Language, as a kind of social practice, has particular effects on language-users; the term discourse is very useful to identify these effects. Discourse refers to the real effects of language-use, as well as to the meaning of language (Codd, 1988, p. 242). Furthermore, discourse can mediate the exercise of power. As Bourdieu (1977, p.648) stated, “language is not only an instrument of communication or even of knowledge, but also an instrument of power. One seeks not only to be understood but also to be obeyed, respected, distinguished.” The power that language makes can be furthered through the notion of discursive power.

Education policies are often considered as constructed from discourses and ideologies that are discursively produced within specific contexts (Taylor, 2004). Official discourses regarding educational policies can also become instruments and objects of power (Codd, 1988). This research tradition owes a great deal to Foucault (1977), who contributed in unveiling the concept that power that is exercised through the discourse of education. For Foucault, language seemed mainly an instrument of power. He argued that power is exercised through the production, accumulation, and functioning of various discourses, rather than possessed and localized in individual hands. The development of particular forms of language meets the needs of the powerful and depended on a particular exercise of power through discourse practices (Foucault, 1977).

Although Foucault was interested in the social and political analysis of discursive practices, he did not employ textual analysis. His neglect of textual analysis in his work was noted by Fairclough, who extended Foucault’s ideas in his own Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Fairclough (1989; 1995) attempted to integrate the theories of discourse originated by Foucault with more linguistic approaches to discourse analysis. He attempted to analyze not only the particular uses of language within actual texts, but also the relationship between those texts and the wider realm of discursive practices to which they belonged. Fairclough stated:

In seeing language as discourse and as social practice, one is committing oneself not just to analyzing texts, nor just to analyzing processes of production and interpretation, but to analyzing the relationship between texts, processes, and their social conditions, both the
immediate conditions of the situational context and the more remote conditions of institutional and social structures (1989, p. 26).

In general, CDA is concerned with a critical theory of social world and the relationship of discourse in the construction and representation of this social world (Rogers, 2011). Fairclough (2001) sums up the questions posed by CDA as follows: “how does language figure as an element in social processes? What is the relationship of language to other elements of social processes?” (p. 229). Fairclough suggested an analytical framework for CDA, including a detailed explanation for its stages and numerous examples of its implementation.

Fairclough (2001) suggested interactional analysis as a crucial and central part of CDA. He argued that every form of semiotic activity, even written texts, is seen in interactive terms. Texts are written with particular audiences in mind, and anticipate particular sorts of reception and responses, and are therefore also interactive (Bakhtin, 1986). According to Fairclough (2001), the focus of CDA was intended to be to show how semiotic, including linguistic, properties of the text connect with what is occurring socially in an interaction. More specifically, to unveil the interdiscursively mediated connections. Fairclough suggested the following four analysis methods for interactional analysis for CDA:

(a) whole-text language organization – the narrative, argumentative etc, structure of a text; (b) clauses combination – the linking of clauses in complex or compound sentences; (c) clauses (simple sentences) – the grammar and semantics of clauses, including categories such as transitivity (transitive or intransitive verbs), verbs relating to action (thoughts, speech, being, having), voice (active, passive), mood (declarative, interrogative, imperative), and modality (degrees of commitment to truth or necessity); (d) Words - choice of vocabulary, semantic relations between words (synonyms and hyponyms), denotative and connotative meaning, collocations and metaphorical uses of words (Fairclough, 2001, pp.241-242).

Interactional analysis can contribute by showing how linguistic properties of texts relate to what is going on socially in the interaction (Fairclough, 2001).

B. The Development of Education Reform in Korea

The May 31st reform proposals began to be mapped out as soon as the new government was inaugurated. The former president, Young-Sam Kim, was the first civilian (non-military man) president who put an end to over 30 years of military rule in Korea. His new government made a vehement effort to remedy and rebuild all aspects of Korean society under the banner of “Making a New Korea.” President Kim altered the phrase “British disease” Used by Margaret Thatcher’s government (CITE A SOURCE) into the phrase “Korean disease”, to use as an election slogan, because the government suggested that most of the reform proposals were based on public choice theory(Y. Kim, 2012).

Education was also one focus of social reform at that time. The Presidential Committee on Education Reform was established in February of 1994. In terms of power, the committee was much more powerful than similar organizations of the past. The committee was composed of 25 members, some from educational circles and some from economic circles. The committee held numerous seminars and workshops on how to make education reform proposals. The most important task for the committee was to prepare a report for the President. The presidential system of state is operated in Korea, which means that policies included in this report for the president were likely guaranteed to be adopted and implemented through the support of the country’s most powerful leader. The first report for the President, published on September 5, 1994, was a preliminary report. The second report for the President, made public on May 31, 1995, included a forecast for the future society, diagnosed education matters in Korea, and made recommendations for new education policies.

For the purposes of the current study, some information regarding two key figures should be noted. Se-Il Park was a professor who majored in law and economics and was appointed as an expert member of the Presidential Committee for Education Reform. He resigned midway through his appointment because he was appointed to the post of Senior Secretary to the President for State Affairs Planning in December of 1994. He diffused discourse of globalization to other organizations after he began to work in the Blue House with the President, and supported education reform that could cope with
globalization. Another committee member, Joo-Ho Lee, was also from a non-education background. His prior experience was as a research fellow at a Korean economic institute (Korean Development Institute: KDI). After he finished his work with the committee, he was elected as a Proportional Representative member of the National Assembly in 2004 and was appointed as the Minister of Education in 2009. As a Proportional Representative and the Minister of Education, he proposed numerous bills for the May 31st education reform and implemented countless education policies.

Special attention is placed on these two individuals because they played an important role in making reform proposals. In hindsight, Jae-Woong Kim (2015), a research fellow for the committee, stated that it was the members from non-education circles, especially Myung-Hyun Lee, Se-Il Park, and Joo-Ho Lee, who were responsible for leading the proposal process. The direction and important reform agendas were proposed by the individuals without an education background, and the role that those with education expertise played was limited (Kim, 2015). Those with education backgrounds mainly took part in changing reform agendas into concrete policies.

II. Methods

Although four documents related to the May 31st education reform are analyzed in this study, the most important one is the second report to the president by the committee of education reform. This is considered the most important of the seven reports that the committee issued because it presents not only the reasons why education reform was needed, but also the overall directions of new education, as well as some important proposals for education reform. In addition, because this study investigates the change of the usage and the meaning of the key concept of autonomy in the planning of education reform, analysis of the first report focuses on comparison with the second report in terms of the usage of the discourse of autonomy.

In general, CDA includes an analysis of the processes of production and dissemination of a text. As mentioned earlier, because Se-Il Park and Joo-Ho Lee are referred as the two key individuals who have played an important role in making and implementing the education reforms, texts they wrote were analyzed in order to comprehend their characteristics, as well as issues present in the reform. In this regard, two papers were analyzed. The first one was an article by Se-Il Park that is the first chapter of a book published by a policy research institute that was closely associated with the Ruling Party at that time (1995). This book covered comprehensive content from education reform in general to concrete policy proposals, and was written by many people including key figures in the new government. The book was considered at the time as the most important book that showed the direction of the education reform of the new government, and received considerable readership (ADD CITATION). Park’s chapter was titled: *The change of conception around education for the age of globalization: From regulation to deregulation.*

The second text was by Joo-Ho Lee and his colleague Gwang-Sik Shin, which was titled *The directions and tasks of education reform: An economic approach* (CITATION). Some might argue that since this paper was not widely disseminated, the analysis of this text might not be appropriate to CDA. However, Joo-Ho Lee articulated some important ideas about education reform in this paper. As a result, this text was selected for its potential to provide valuable clues regarding the discourse of autonomy. In all, four papers explored:

• (a) the 1st report for the President by the Committee of Education Reform – Report of 1994,
• (b) the 2nd report for the President by the Committee of Education Reform – Report of 1995,
• (c) the article by Se-Il Park,
• (d) the article by Joo-Ho Lee and Gwang-Sik Shin

III. Results

A. Not Autonomy but Deregulation

It is very interesting that not autonomy, but deregulation, that was represented as a keyword for education reform in both Park’s article and Lee & Shin’s article. The discourse of autonomy was represented only a few times, whereas the discourse of deregulation appeared extensively in both papers. In the reports of 1994 and
1995, however, use of the term of autonomy was more frequently used, and use deregulation was diminished considerably, particularly in the report of 1995. After public disclosure of the education reform proposals, the discourse of autonomy was adopted by the mass media as a keyword that characterized the reform proposals. Based on the fact that that the term deregulation was closely related to the term autonomy, and deregulation was represented in policy documents prior to autonomy, we analyzed the discourse of deregulation first.

Because every discourse has a relational and representative value in relation to certain social, political, and economic context (Fairclough, 1989), conducting CDA must include an analysis regarding context. The discourse of deregulation was suggested based on trends of globalization and increased access to information. Globalization, which especially stood out in Park’s article, brought about an unstable image that may have been accompanied by pressing damage.

Globalization is defined as ‘the borderless economy,’ with the border being described as ‘a protective cocoon.’ This assumes the new world made by globalization will be a space in which the harsh competition is prevalent. The fact that the discourse of globalization is related to ‘survivor’ or ‘loser of history’ also provides readers with an image that they live in a state in which desperate choices could be just around the corner. The discourse of globalization and information is also connected to some adverbs or adjectives that describe an extreme state, such as ‘exceedingly’, ‘considerably high’, or ‘exponentially’ and this implies that we have no choice but to accept a policy proposal with no alternatives.

As for the style of representation, a soliloquy is frequently used in Park’s article. For example, “what does the age of globalization mean? In short, it means the time that the border is disappeared” (p.15). And “what about the reality of Korean education? I’d say, from a conclusion, the 21st century of Korea is very dark”(p.17).

This kind of representation affects readers. This style of writing style can be effectively used when an expert shares information with a novice. The readers, who take on the novice role, have no choice but to accept the expert’s opinion. As a result, although Held and McGrew (2000) state that there is considerable controversy around globalization, globalization is simply used in Park’s article without any acknowledgement of the controversy. In addition, Park’s article is composed of a series of short, assertive sentences. The novice readers have to follow the writer’s assertion. In this regard, this paper is one-sided.

In all the four texts, deregulation is represented as an antonym of regulation. Regulation is often connected with the terms uniformity, standardization, rigidity, and authoritative, and is referred to as “the object of the abolition” (Park, p.12). By choosing the expression “the end of national socialism,” Mr. Se-Il Park reminds readers of a horrible event still vivid in their memories in order to maximize a negative image of regulation. In this way, a bright image of deregulation, implied as something diverse, flexible, and good, is inscribed on the subconscious of readers.

As for the rationale of regulation, the phrase “the convenience and gain of regulation provider or education provider” makes an appearance several times (Lee & Shin, p. 4). Needless to say, the words convenience and gain evoke somewhat negative images of regulation. When faced with this phrase, readers are likely to be reminded of immoral regulation providers who seek their own interest without having the public good in mind. In addition, the scope of provider is not clear-cut in any of the sources analyzed. Although government seems to be included as a regulation provider, whether teachers are included or not is not distinct. When teachers are assumed to be included as regulation providers, teachers are also regarded as immoral beings. When Mr. Park says that “we now have to liberate education from regulation,” it creates an effect that the absolute majority, except a handful of regulation providers, embraced a liberation army, where deregulation is considered something sacred.

Critical analysis of discourse is an analysis of what is left out as well as what is said: not only what is present, but also what is absent (Rogers, 2011). In this regard, it needs to be emphasized that only one-sided statements regarding regulation appear in the texts. That is, although regulation can be rationalized in terms of market failure, public-interested redistribution, and collective desires and aspirations (Sunstein, 1990), only the negative functions that regulation influence make an appearance in the documents. As a result, Park’s article rids readers of the opportunity to remember the positive functions of regulation.
B. From Deregulation to Autonomy

Unlike the two articles that were written by economists, the term regulation is often substituted for the term autonomy in the two reports for the President. For example, “deregulation of higher education” is replaced by “autonomy of higher education” and “deregulation of private school” is substituted for “autonomy of private school.” Although the subtitle of Park’s article was “from regulation to deregulation,” the phrase “from regulation to autonomy” is used in the reports for the President. This example shows that the discourse of autonomy is used in a similar meaning to deregulation.

If that is the case, what caused the term deregulation change to the term autonomy? When it comes down to it, there seemed to be no evidence that could explain the rationale behind the change. It might have been because the term deregulation was unfamiliar to the committee members from education circles. Out of 25 expert members of the Presidential Committee on Education Reform, almost 20 were from an education background. These members may have been accustomed to use of the term of autonomy, rather than deregulation. In order to better communicate with these members, the initiators of the education reform ideas might have thought that they could have reached their goals more easily by substituting autonomy for deregulation.

Since the mid-1980s the term autonomy was used by Korean education professionals to promote the future of Korean education. Because Korean education had been carried out for over 30 years under military rule, many educators suggested it was an urgent task to compensate for the numerous defects of the uniform and authoritative educational administration. The following extract (Chung, 1991) shows the atmosphere of the education circle at that time.

Korean education has suffered from a severe authoritarian and monolithic education system. Inefficient educational administration, low morale of teachers, and lethargic learning stem from the state of heteronomy. ... The new concept of autonomy and creativity points the new direction of Korean education. ... Autonomy is the number one characteristic of professionals. The autonomy of teachers, school, university, and local education council should be respected by the ministry of education (pp. 432-433).

Considering that for education professionals, autonomy meant the freedom from government regulation, the economists might have suggested that autonomy would produce the same effects with the discourse of deregulation. For this reason, they seemed to replace deregulation with autonomy (Kim, 2012a). It is interesting to note that the status of teachers was not the same in the above extract and in that of Park’s and Lee & Shin’s articles. As mentioned earlier, teachers were often described as people who sought their own benefits and conveniences within the two articles. The extract, however, represents teachers as professionals who suffered under government regulation. In relation to this regulation, the position of teachers was the exact opposite between the documents. As a result of this, there was vascillation between teachers as the object of evaluation and teachers as the object of respect in the two reports for the President.

C. Deregulated Education

What did the discourse of deregulation of education imply? In Park’s article, as well as in Lee & Shin’s article, education was frequently connected with ‘service’ or ‘industry’ and the parties concerned were classified into ‘education suppliers’ and ‘education demanders.’ These business-like terms implied that education was a kind of tradable commodity.

Meanwhile, deregulated education, a response to years of education under a military regime, represented a new image different from that of ‘old’ education. In the two articles, education prior to deregulation was connected with ‘illness’ or ‘failure’ and described by adverbs that characterized a severe state, such as ‘extremely unsatisfactory’ and ‘very dark.’ Deregulated education in the age of globalization, in contrast, was extolled as ‘the driving force of state development’ and connected with ‘innovation and reform’ and ‘national competitiveness.’ Deregulated education was introduced as contradictory to pre-existing education, which was closely linked to regulation, bureaucracy, and egalitarianism using terms such as ‘old,’ ‘oppressive,’ and ‘low quality.’ Deregulated education was connected with the terms ‘new’ and ‘innovation,’ And when its implementation was suggested, the phrases ‘must’, ‘have to’, or ‘have no choice but
to’ were often used. These expressions implied that there was no alternative but to accept this new deregulated education.

Another interesting point is that not teachers, but education entrepreneurs or education businessmen, were referred to as the agent of education reform in the two articles. As mentioned earlier, teachers were described as a kind of rent-seeker in the articles. The expression ‘the deception and fraudulency of education suppliers’ which appeared in Lee & Shin’s article, implicitly represented the perceptions made of teachers. Joo-Ho Lee criticized Korean education in which there was no competition between teachers, only between students, which implicitly targeted the indolence of teachers. In that the behavior of teachers was assumed not to be different from that of other government employees, the two articles, and parts of the reports for the president, were based on public choice theory. As Jacob Michaelson put it, “we may assume that bureaucrats, including schoolmen, seek ... to survive, to enlarge the scope of their activities, to gain prestige, to control the organization and content of their daily round as much as possible” (1977, p. 329).

Unlike teachers, education entrepreneurs or businessmen, the new agents of education reform in the age of globalization and vivid, were described as ‘creative and vivid.’ Words like ‘enterprising,’ ‘restructuring,’ and ‘reengineering’ were directly used to explain new agents instead of the appropriate Korean equivalents to those words. These words portrayed education entrepreneurs as new, fresh, and challenging agents. Furthermore, education entrepreneurs or businessmen, who might infuse life into Korean education, were considered as agents who undertook public service and obligation by implication. New agents were suggested in contrast to pre-existing education suppliers, who only pursued their interests and convenience. Such strategies would likely lead readers to think of education entrepreneurs as agents who devoted themselves to the public good. Considering that businessmen were usually described as ‘covetous’ or ‘pursuers of private interest’ in Korea, the articles might have promoted change in the readers’ way of thinking about businessmen or entrepreneurs. Time, however, will reveal the true nature of deregulated education and the new agents of education reform.

D. The Space Created by Autonomy

Autonomy is treated as a kind of imperfect concept in the policy texts. That is, autonomy is almost always used as a phrase that is connected with other concepts such as ‘autonomy and competition’ or ‘autonomy and accountability.’ Autonomy is not considered as a goal itself, but as a means to other higher values (Kim, 2012). Reviewing the policy texts that formed the basis of this study, two things about autonomy are implied. First is that autonomy can function as a mechanism that invokes competition. The second is that autonomy should be supplemented by accountability, because unregulated autonomy may lead to self-indulgence.

As for the discourse of autonomy, there are a few ‘interested parties.’ School choice policy is suggested as a kind of autonomy policy in Korea, so students and parents are represented as groups who can enjoy autonomy. In contrast, teachers are considered as disqualified from autonomy. Teachers can enjoy more autonomy in curriculum management and other works in schools thanks to the reforms centered on autonomy. However, teachers are chosen by students and parents, and have no choice but to accept various evaluations that are suggested as accountability policy. This is a very different reality from the expectations that the supporters of teacher autonomy try to realize. In addition, because government is regarded as an enemy of autonomy, there is no role for the government in education autonomy, except to disclose information, and a few other things to ease operation of the education market.

The discourse of autonomy affects students, parents, and teachers differently. It is school choice that students and parents can directly enjoy by virtue of the discourse of autonomy. They can ‘buy’ the education service they prefer because of school choice. It is not true, however, that everyone can ‘buy’ education services. Only some people who have enough resources can enjoy school choice. School choice classifies students and parents into those who can do and those who cannot. Furthermore, schools and teachers also have to differentiate themselves from other similar schools and teachers in order to be chosen by students and parents. In this regard, distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) is indeed the real effect that the discourse of autonomy produces, both to students and parents and to teachers.
The space of distinction can be a space of competition. It is needless to say that it is teachers who have to compete for more students and resources. According to the results, the performances of teachers are also distinguished. Teachers have to prove their excellence in a highly competitive market. Although some teachers may be praised as ‘competent’ teachers, others will be criticized as ‘incompetent and lazy’ teachers. Furthermore, as only one criterion, money, exists in the market, the performance of teachers will be standardized using monetary standards. It is not loose autonomy but harsh competition that teachers encounter before the discourse of autonomy. Meanwhile, according to the logic of deregulation that is painted as the discourse of autonomy, because the government is regarded as the opponent of autonomy, the less government does, the better it is.

In this regard, it is indeed a free market of education services that the discourse of autonomy intends to make. The free market is a place where students, parents, and teachers buy and sell education services without any intervention. Because the free market is guaranteed to have no government intervention, and is guided by an invisible hand, deregulation can be the best policy in terms of government regulation.

E. The Realities of Free Market Education Services

The May 31st reform proposals were implemented over 20 years ago. The first policy that stemmed from the discourse of autonomy of school management was the autonomous private high school policy. Before 1995, except for teacher recruitment procedures, there were no significant differences between public schools and private schools in Korea in terms of school management. Private secondary schools in Korea had often been recognized as quasi-public schools. Advocates of the education reform of autonomy, as a most urgent policy, continued to insist that private high schools should be liberated from government regulation. Unlike other private high schools, autonomous private high schools were able to exercise their right to choose students to a limited extent. The autonomous private high schools were also able to implement a school curriculum with latitude and to freely fix their tuition fees (Kim, 2012b).

Although the expectations for autonomous private high schools were considerable, Koreans soon became aware of the realities of these schools. Despite the large scope of schools that students could choose from, only some people could enjoy the opportunities provided. The autonomous private schools did not diversify school programs at all. These schools, rather, enjoyed their latitude regarding school curriculum in order to better prepare students for the college entrance examination (Sung, 2005). In addition, they enjoyed enrolling only top students from other high schools. As a result, autonomous private schools led to the ranking of high schools.

Various accountability policies for teachers were also strongly promoted. Diverse evaluations of teachers’ performance included contributions from students and parents, as well as peer teachers. In addition, standardized tests were introduced in schools. Test results were utilized for teacher merit pay. The policy for the autonomy of curriculum, which was connected with standardized tests, also deprived teachers of their flexibility regarding curriculum choice (Berryhill, Linney, & Fromewick, 2009). As various accountability policies were institutionalized successively, it became evident that it was not professional accountability, but contractual accountability (Codd, 1999) that was being imposed on teachers. Teachers became aware that they were considered a target of reform, rather than agents of change (Ko, 2002).

As more policies for autonomy are introduced in schools and free market education services are broadened, the number of people concerned about having a meltdown of public education caused by neoliberal education policies has been increasing. A majority of people have become aware that neoliberal policies claiming to stand for ‘autonomy’ may be detrimental to the democracy and society of Korea. Many educators have realized that the discourse of autonomy means the marketization of education, and the evaluation of the discourse of autonomy has varied dramatically in Korean education policy.

IV. Conclusion

Through critical discourse analysis, we found that the discursive effect of the discourse of autonomy in Korean education reform was to create a free market for education services. The discourse of autonomy replaced the discourse
of deregulation, which meant abolishing government interventions.

When education is assumed as a private good, not as a public good, government intervention for protecting public goods is considered as harmful to the operation of the free market where educational services are traded. In the place of government intervention, an invisible hand is expected to establish a harmonious order in the free market of educational services. This new space formed by the discourse of autonomy, however, only includes special groups of parents and students. Under the ranking system established through policies promoting the autonomy of schools, not only many students and parents, but also teachers have suffered. The new policies accompanied by the discourse of autonomy and accountability, based on the culture of distrust (Olssen et al, 2004), deprived teachers of their professional latitude and professional responsibility. The discourse of deregulation foretold these realities.

The term autonomy, which had been espoused by education professionals and introduced as a substitute for the discourse of deregulation, might have prevented them from penetrating into the realities of education reform promoted through the discourse of deregulation. The term autonomy might have contributed to mask the reality of deregulated education, which was the marketization of education resulting from neoliberal education reform. Kim (2002) warned that the hidden goal of the autonomy policies was to decrease public education expense and, that everyone should be careful not to be fooled by the discourse of autonomy. However, it took a long time for many educators to penetrate the realities and effects of the discourse of autonomy. This is a good example of the fact that language serves a political purpose (Codd, 1988, p. 21).

The political effects of the discourses that were made and circulated in the process of education reform are global in scale. For example, Davies (1999), through an interview with an important figure in education reform in England, made it clear that many self-managing school policies or autonomy policies were developed for entirely political reasons. Davies (1999) concluded that “the real agenda was to punish the teacher unions and to kill off the local educational authorities; secretly the big master plan was to wipe out comprehensive schools by stealth” (p.1). Reviewing self-managing school reforms in USA, Canada, England, New Zealand and Australia, Smyth (2011) also argued that the real effect of the self-managing school reform was virtually to dismantle public education and privatize it without public debate or proper scrutiny. Smyth (1993) illustrated that although the self-managing school was not fundamentally about ‘choice,’ ‘grassroots democracy,’ or ‘parent participation,’ the discourses around self-managing school reform such as ‘self-managing’ and ‘autonomy’ prevented educators from grasping the actual effects of the reforms.

Finally, the problems around the politics of discourses in education reform can be intensified in policy borrowing countries. For instance, analyzing education reform in Korea, Sung (2011) demonstrated that in order to validate the pursuit of privileged opportunities, the upper middle class tended to utilize the terms choice and diversity in ways aligned with neoliberal perspectives. He showed that although the two discourses received support from progressivists, as well neoliberalists, the terms used to highlight some aspects of neoliberal policies were advantageous to particular social groups. Takayama (2007) also argued that the Japanese government, under the support and pressure of neoliberal sectors, had manipulated the progressive concepts of autonomy and diversity as euphemisms for devolution, choice, marketization, and a minimalistic state. These cases show that some borrowed policy discourses might have been understood by policy stakeholders differently, and have had considerably different effects than anticipated.

These days language has played a more important role in education policy-making. The traditional technical-empiricist view of policy-making, however, fails to comprehend some important phenomena around the politics of the discourse in education change. In this study we demonstrated that CDA can be utilized to critically analyze education policy and improve our understanding of policy.

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