

Eighth Period – The Stolen Hour

- Overview of the Current Situation

Our Eighth Period Class	Eighth Period Class According to Law
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mandatory attendance ➤ To makeup progress for classes such as Chinese, English, Math, Social Studies, and Natural Science ➤ Could last up through 6 or 7 pm! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Non-mandatory attendance ➤ To include extracurricular, arts, or humanities activities ➤ Must end by 5:30 PM

1. Our Eighth Period

Despite the specific mentioning in the <**Guidelines for Remedial Courses Held by High Schools and Above**> regarding restrictions on teaching students course materials ahead of schedule and that students have the right to choose whether to attend class or not, as well as the requirement of ending classes no later than 5:30 PM, the truth is that what goes on is a completely different story! The following two points are what we believe to be unfair:

- *Mandatory Attendance, Content Always Involves Materials from Required Courses*

In our school, the notification we receive does not come with a check box for “Not Attending.” Even if other schools offer such option, students will still attend the class because they understand that these classes will be used as an extra session for either teaching official course material, making up for progress of other classes, or administering tests (Note 1). Finally, students are not proactive enough to defend their right to choose, which they are entitled to. This also quietly infringes upon the rights of students who cannot attend the eighth period class.

Note 1: In Taiwan, course load is extremely heavy, consisting of endless lessons and exams.

- *Does the Government Proactively Take up Its Role in Supervising?*

As far as I know, it is considered perfectly normal for students attending the elite classes at private schools to have classes all the way to 6 or 7 pm. Usually, the pretext for keeping the kids in school is “self-studying,” but the real reason is actually just to make time for more regular classes. In other cases, the school forces students to do self-studying until 5 PM before they’re allowed to go home. My question is why do these situation – which clear violates of the law – still exist and are quite common? Isn’t the government being too lax in supervising the schools?

2. Solutions

- *Allow Students to Attend Diversity Courses Freely*

Let’s take our school as an example: to achieve the goal of promoting international education, our school added a number of classes in related areas. Naturally, these additional classes will affect the standard course load for students. Therefore, we

believe that these additional classes should be scheduled after the end of the school day, while attendance for these classes should be voluntary. This way, students who have no interest in taking any of these specialty courses can have a break.

- *Don't Teach that Many Things!*

Our school classes will last all the way through the eighth period – or even beyond. This is usually due to the progress of classes. Even though the Ministry of Education wants students to be knowledgeable in all subjects and achieve diversified learning, the method which the agency adopted is a “force-feeding” approach, making students to memorize a large amount of information over a short period of time. At the end, what everyone is doing is preparing for the college entrance exam. It is definitely not about utilizing the acquired knowledge in our day-to-day life!

Student Government – Serving Whom?

Our Student Government	Student Gov. According to Law
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Providing convenient free labor for the school ➤ Usually sandwiched between school administration and students, between democracy and authoritarianism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ To promote ability to self-govern among students ➤ To enhance study efficiency of students at school

1. Our Student Government

- *Democratic Group under Authoritarian Regime*

Using the pretext of nurturing the students’ aptitude for democracy and the rule of law, schools organize the election for student government officials every year. However, when the student government attempts to convey the opinions of students, and thanks to the fact that there is no way for equal power to be reached between the school and students, what usually happens is that the proposals are rejected without due process. So aren’t we just having a student government – which is created through a democratic progress – provide continued support for an authoritarian regime in education which is based on rule of man? After the election every year, do the students actually learn anything about the rule of law? Or do we simply learn to accommodate to the tantrums of our teachers?

- *Absolute Inequality*

- For example, the student government which I helped to establish came under scrutiny from a number of students due to administrative negligence by the school administration. The school suspended the student government’s power and rights with a simple announcement during the flag-raising ceremony one morning. There wasn’t even any advanced notice, and it didn’t even undergo review it at the school meeting beforehand.

2. Solution

- *The government should give “student government” a clear definition*

The more ambiguous the definition of student government is, the more liberty schools will have to interpret it in their one way, which becomes an infringement upon our rights.

1. What is the meaning of student government?
Currently, the description of student government under the Senior High School Education Act is “to enhance the study effectiveness and the ability to self-govern among students.” However, what self-govern means here is running errands for teachers, while ‘enhancing study effectiveness at school’ is forcing us to learn about which of our rights have been violated? Something definitely sounds wrong, but these were the questions I’ve encountered during my stint as student government official.
2. The method and procedure for electing student government officials:
Is it through election, by signing up, or just assigned by teachers? If the government doesn’t lay down concrete rules and procedures, the school can adopt the “rule of man” approach in determining the procedures. For example, I help founded the first student government in my school last year. But after several months, the director of education at my school thought we were galvanizing public opinion, so the organization was disbanded through an announcement at the student’s morning assembly.

- **Adding Seats to the School Affairs Meeting (Note 2)**

Perhaps all of you assume that it’s a great thing to be elected as a student government official – your resume looks good for college application, you get to make a lot of friends, and so on. But the truth of the matter is, student government official has an important duty – to reflect the opinions of the student body. Yet, because students only take up two seats at the school affairs meeting, any proposal submitted by us rarely survives (dress code is a good example). However, the freedom and autonomy of students is decided by staff and faculty of the school who are unrelated to them – and the excuse is that it’s going to endanger the school’s reputation otherwise. **So, what is more important to the school? The students themselves or the school’s superficial reputation?**

Note 2: In Taiwan, schools must allocate two seats to students at the school affairs meeting, to allow them to participate and to jointly make decisions on students’ affairs.

Corporal Punishment

What We Think Corporal Punishment is	Corporal Punishment According to Law
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Punitive writing or copying ➤ Standing in the corner ➤ Punitive squatting or running laps ➤ Caning on the palms 	Order students to adopt certain physical position as corporal punishment, such as: squatting, semi-crouch, or punitive kneeling

1. Our Corporal Punishment

The Education Fundamental Act specifically bans the implementation of corporal punishment for students. Yet, when we do something wrong, teachers often use their subjective views to decide whether we need to be punished or not, and use punishment as a way to justify that we’ve learned our lessons. What is corporal

punishment? We all believe that the strict definition of corporal punishment means a punishment which actually results in physical pain or discomfort. How about the broader meaning of the term? Forcing you to repeatedly copy the contents of the textbook, ordering you to stand in the corner after class, or putting restrictions on your time to leave class: wouldn't such punitive measures – which looks minor – be considered a form of corporal punishment?

- **What is Appropriate Disciplining?**

“How do you discipline students without corporal punishment?” The truth is, there's always room for ambiguity when it comes to disciplining and corporal punishment. How should you punish? What's the limit in terms of severity of punishment? From the legal perspective, when teacher implement corporal punishment upon students, even if they have sufficient basis from an educator's standpoint to adopt appropriate methods, there's always a possibility for the act to become an injury offense. I believe that appropriate corporal punishment is fine. However, the whole point is to let the student repent his or her misconduct; it is not for the teacher to decide what is the best way to teach us a lesson based on their own personal bias. Such will only inflict unnecessary pain upon students! If the reason why the student complies with the teacher's demand is simply to avoid being punished, what is the point of corporal punishment?

- **Rule of Law? Rule of Man?**

According to law, there is no clear definition of corporal punishment. The “Guiding Principles of the Methods of Guidance and Discipline” expressly stipulates that “Corporal Punishment” can be divided into “Legal and Appropriate” punishments and “Illegal” or “Inappropriate” punishment. Now, how can one determine what is “inappropriate?” The judgement is usually based on the teacher's standpoint. When students feel that a given issue is unjust and unfair, and try to mobilize actions of civil disobedience, the attempt is suppressed by teachers and corporal punishment is administered on the grounds of “disrespecting teachers and elders.” Would such approach be considered the rule of man or the rule of law? If the law cannot provide a clear definition, how can we go ahead and protect our own rights?

Conclusion

After going through the examples we've encountered in our daily life, we have organized the traits which are common among these cases:

- **Lack of Procedural Justice**

The director can order the student government to disband without due process, and the teacher can implement corporal punishment on students without observing procedures, these are all good examples. Such school administration matters without procedural justice create a serious impact upon us kids. If such is the case, it is possible that in the future, we will do the same thing they did, thereby making such behavior a firm and unbreakable cycle.

- **The Government Passes the Law, But Fails to Proactively Supervise**

For students, the eighth period is a very commonplace and mundane thing – even the fact that only relatively few people know that the schools have violated the law. As for the government, it never carried out its duties in supervising schools on how they handle classes scheduled for the eighth period.

- **Failure to Inform us about Possible Channels for Remedy, Children’s Rights**

The majority of things taught in our civics class consist of course materials that have to be memorized, and most students don’t even realize that there’s a thing called “Convention of the Rights of a Child.” When faced with inappropriate punishment, there are seldom remedy procedures, or very few knew of the existence of remedy procedures. It is possible that in the future, we may bring the ignorance on human rights with us into society.