

On campus and in family, we are constantly being told that “schoolwork is everything.” When getting bullied at school, few adults care. Some even say that it’s the victim’s fault. Especially when the victim does badly with schoolwork or comes from a financially poor family, the school is indifferent towards the victim. Parents’ putting grades over everything else make students afraid of speaking about the difficulties they face. Our rights are not valued highly; they are sometimes totally ignored. When we don’t get the rights we deserve, even if the school provides a channel for filing complaints, it is no use, because the school only wants to settle things in private. Often, when questions and needs are proposed, teachers try to stop our voices from being heard, using their authority or others’. Students’ self-rule groups do not own the actual power to speak on students’ behalves. They are more like entertainment clubs or some sort of ornaments. At most schools, student organizations are on-existent.

We want to say that, we live in a society in which no one cares about children’s dignity or rights. Adults are eager to turn us into docile kids, most ideally straight-A students who listen to them well. One week prior to any exam, student clubs are asked to close. It is common to see teachers give us lower grades just because we don’t do as they say. If we ever suggest that our rights should be observed, adults shush us with words like “you are too little to know the world. Don’t think too much. Just study well and go to a good school.” If a student disagrees with his or her teacher, the student is often refuted with the following statements, too, “students don’t reserve human rights,” “a student’s job is to study; you are only entitled to ask for rights when you qualify for a better school,” and “other students can live with the circumstances; why can’t you?” In many families, parents justify their behaviors and deprive their children of their right of personal freedom or put on “economic sanctions,” by saying “you should listen to me because I am your father (mother),” “I stop you from doing this and that for your own good,” “I beat, curse (and insult) you because I care for you.”

In such a societal aura, whether at school or home, no one would listen to us, let alone discussing political issues that are related to us. Most students think, right, there are national laws, but mere laws. Schools are good at violating the laws; the laws are not useful at all. Therefore, public participation is a fairy tale. If in a society, it is extremely difficult for a child to express his or her opinion and the child often gets ignored, how is it possible for the child to pluck up the courage to participate in politics?

In the past few years, quite a few social movements occurred, led by university students who have come of age. But a few of the students involved are underage and they went to the streets to take part. In 2015, a nation-wide movement was launched, mostly by underage junior and senior high school students. They protested against the Ministry of Education for stipulating a controversial curriculum through unjust procedures. In the following two years, more actions were taken by senior high school students, mostly aiming to win the rights they deserve from teachers. Adults tend to think that children and teenagers are not able to think for themselves properly, and therefore younger

students are constantly ignored. The school's decision-making mechanisms play a role, too. Unless the participating students can withstand the oppressions and picking-on from school authorities, and handle the ensuing physical and mental harm, the students will fail to reach their goals through the movements.

It is near the due date of this report. We will not present all of the questionnaires and surveys conducted, but just highlight the difficulties the student interviewees faced when they took part in public movements first.

Last year (2016), believing that the students' representative election results came from under the table, student Z from Taipei Hwa Kang Arts School suggested that any representative of the students' union or students' self-rule group should be openly elected by all of the school's students. He initiated the Hwa Kang Arts School Students Union Preparatory Committee and held the committee's first meeting. In threatening messages sent to LINE groups, the school's teachers then implied that students would be in trouble if they join the committee, or mentioned anything about the committee. The school's student affairs director also sent private LINE messages to students who liked Z's fan page, trying to oppress them. The school even released a public comment on their fan page "Hwa Kang Arts School", saying that Z was defaming the school, and that the school would oppose all of Z's preparatory committee activities. Also because the school informed alumni of this matter through Facebook Messenger, Z was much criticized.

Z received one major demerit for "ruining the school's reputation" because he revealed the under-the-table procedures. Then, in one class, Z was taken to another classroom by a janitor without prior notice. In that classroom were more than 200 students and teachers. The school asked Z to speak to them with the presence of a camera. The principal said she wanted to ask Z many questions, but when Z tried to answer, she interrupted with the following words, "you are political maniac," "you only think about yourself," "you are self-centered," "you are such a bad kid, you speak nonsense and know nothing about ethics at all," pointing fingers at Z. Then she asked Z to disband the committee and delete all articles posted on the committee's fan page, and forced the committee members to discuss matters concerning suspending the students' union for good with her. Then, the school encouraged other students to post flyers which include comments against Z throughout the campus (such as "don't let politics make art dirty," "political maniacs are not welcome at art schools," and "don't make Hwa Kang political"). Z asked the student affairs director why other students were able to post slogans or posters against him freely, while he was forbidden from posting formal announces about the preparatory committee? The director said it was because the principal agreed with the content of the slogans and posters.

The next day, the principal even told quite a few students, "We do not want a political person like him in our school. He is not qualified to be a student of Hwa Kang." (to see the video, visit : <https://youtu.be/CKVFVR4o5xg>) Z

filed a complaint to the Department of Education but of no avail. Instead, he received two more major and two minor demerits. When interviewing Z, he recalled that during the March 18 Student Movement, he once tried to listen to related radio news at school, but was stopped by a teacher because “you are not allowed to listen to this,” and “the radio is not meant to help you learn this type of news.”

Z said that at the time he felt downtrodden and he also worried he might be punished by the school. Of course, he was scared how he would be treated by the school in the next day. Even though his action taken to gain his own rights was rather mild, the adults’ incompetence in communicating and oppressing him with menace already made him feel hurt.



On May 1, 2015, a group of senior high school students shouted “defend students’ right to choose educational content, rejecting under-the-table curriculum” on their school’s anniversary celebration events which were attended by outside guests and the press, marking the start of the Anti-Black Box Curriculum Movement.

In the next few months, students from a few hundreds of junior high schools, senior high schools and vocational schools spontaneously formed groups supporting the movement, and held open-air speeches and forums throughout Taiwan. Afterwards, the students organized street protests attended by thousands. Months later, the minister of education however still tried to evade responsibility, and he even set up barbed wires around the ministry building.

When students broke into the minister’s office, the minister asked Thunder Squad to arrest the students and filed a law suit against the teenagers. A 19-year-old student committed suicide as a fierce attempt to deliver his requests. The day after their comrade died, the students occupied the ministry compound for a week, during which they negotiated with the minister but the minister was reluctant to adjust his stance. Only due to a typhoon did the students leave the building and returned home.





We interviewed student C who was arrested by Thunder Squad and sued by the minister. C was also an organizer of the occupation of the Ministry of Education. Student L who was arrested and sued was interviewed, too.

The ministry held explanatory gatherings when students started to protest against the problematic curriculum. One such gather held at Taichung Municipal Taichung First Senior High School was attended by the minister of education, who however did not answer students' questions earnestly. As a result, the students tried to stop the minister's car, and asked the minister to stay.



C recalled that they were only trying to stop the minister from leaving, hoping he would then answer their questions. But during the process, the minister's aides kept pulling the students away. When C went to the front of the car to stop the minister, the driver even speeded up, hurting C who couldn't have jumped away in time. A year after, before leaving office, the minister told the press that "someone asked the student to stop my car," although C said there was absolutely no such a person. During the interview, C said that similar comments were everywhere at the time. Even a congressperson of the ruling party publicly said several times that the students were controlled by the opposition party. A few teachers at school told other students in class that "C was manipulated by the opposition party," and so on. C was worried how society, family and friends would think of him daily. He was under great pressure, not knowing when the ruling party would put him in a disadvantaged situation again.

L said that during that period, plenty of strangers either posted public comments on his Facebook wall or sent him private messages, threatening to "kill all of your family" or "watch out! You might get beaten on the streets." People whom he never saw before even tossed joss paper by the school gate, trying to scare him. (In Taiwan culture, joss paper is given to the dead only. Giving it to a living person means the distributor wants the recipient to die.) L also noted that, almost two years after the Anti-Black Box Curriculum Movement was initiated, he was several times found out on the streets and was verbally threatened and insulted. Also, he could only run when those people tried to physically attack him.

When breaking into the minister's office, C and L thought that police might drive them off later. But it was not general police who broke the locked door, but Thunder Squad carrying riot control weapons similar to submachine machine guns. C said that most of the students in the office were underage. They have heard that during street protests police might use water cannons to disperse crowds. But it never dawned on them that they would be greeted with gun-equipped Thunder Squad. At first, two students who just came of age refused the arrest, but they were swiftly put to the floor and got handcuffed.

(to see the video, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V01xBYOBU9g>) Other students could only wait to be arrested on the ground, with their hands tied by cable ties. The students who tried to make videos of what's happening got their phones taken away by the police, and were arrested, too. C said he did not know what to do at the time or how he should feel. He only remembered that he and other students shouted their slogans helplessly until they were arrested. After the arrests, the minister of education immediately sued the arrested students. Until the time of interview, some students were still in the middle of the legal proceedings. Some already received sentence.

One thing has bewildered C since then. On the day of arrests, other than the students, at the minister's office, there were only the police officers who broke in. But the next day, a few newspaper agencies published photos of the scene. More than half of the protesters were underage, but their faces weren't pixelated in the photos. C has to ask if the police provided the footage to the press.



C also said that before participating in the anti-curriculum movement, he was already involved in self-rule student activities at school. Recalling what happened in class, he said that he often argued with teachers for their discriminating comments or biased class content. Some teachers' class could not withstand further examination at all. Most of the school's administration staffers and teachers saw C as a trouble maker. Once he was asked to answer a question by one teacher. After he gave his answer, the teacher insulted him with the following words, "so you're good, huh? Why are you here in class then?", "you've been brainwashed and manipulated," "your ideas are problematic," "are you sick or what?" etc. When he tried to reason, the teacher stopped him with words like "don't ever try to talk back when I'm talking," "what you think is totally wrong," "it's a waste of time to let you talk in class," and so on. A few times, the teacher sent C to the drillmaster's office, wanting to put a demerit on him, for "talking the teacher back." The teacher even bluntly told him once that "just get out of the classroom if you don't want to learn with me. I'm not interested in being your teacher either," and asked C to get out.

C noted that he was often told by other students that while he was absent, some teachers spoke of him as "a fartsy kid who knows nothing but just wants to get famous." They also said that "Taiwan's a mess because of people like him," "a student like him knows nothing – he's a scum and he thinks he can do everything," "his parents are pathetic – if I were his parent I would choke him to death," and so on. C said that because of these previous experiences

he didn't feel so pressured or traumatized like other students did during anti-curriculum movement. He was also more capable of dealing with smears and threats from the public. But for this, among other reasons, he still suffered from melancholia in senior high. He couldn't understand at the time, why when he took actions according to his learnings and ideals, he was treated like that. Was it because he didn't listen to parents and teachers blindly, giving himself in to textbooks?

After the occupation of the Ministry of Education, C and L continue to care for many other issues, not just the ones related to the national curriculum and education. They admitted that society never likes students to do critical thinking; people want students to study well at school and listen to what adults say. Now that it is going to be two years since the anti-curriculum movement took place, they still get threats and curses from strangers. During the interview, the two students said they are accustomed to those, and think they are relatively lucky because they're students. Because they are students, the media are willing to help them spread the news – the mainstream media are indifferent to many issues. Some press however still carried out smear campaigns against the students. (Since 2015, thousands of news articles on the anti-curriculum movement have been released.)

In Taiwan, most students will experience the same things as the three interviewees do, if they ever express opinions that go against adults' views. Adults today are still used to suppress them authoritatively, instead of communicating with students or initiating discussions. While writing this report, some students of a national senior high school staged a protest during the school's anniversary celebrations. The school did not try to understand what happened, but only reported the case to the police and asked police officers to "catch" the students on campus. Although the students weren't formally arrested, the officers still helped the school to find the students involved and bringing them to the school's student affairs office. Few students can withstand such pressure as the three interviewees do. C noted that many students got less pocket money from parents for participating in the anti-curriculum movement. Some got grounded at home; they were not allowed to go out unless with the companion of their parents. Some more were even deprived of all living expenses and got kicked out of the house. C mentioned that, at the protest site, he saw some parents dragged their children into their cars for home, regardless how unwilling their children were. He never saw those students again.

In such circumstances, the underaged are almost always ignored when they try to contribute some opinions, let alone participating in street protests or governmental organizations for children and teenagers. It is also because adults do not care about any of the underaged's opinions that students in Taiwan are not used to do critical thinking or express themselves. Most of the students believe that even if they try to say something, no adults will ever listen to them. They might even be threatened in all possible ways.