

# On the Educational Punishment Boundary of Maintaining Students' Dignity

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**Abstract:** In recent years, educational punishment has become a buzzword. While discussing the positive role of educational punishment, we must adhere to its boundaries. Otherwise, it may be distorted and turned into its opposite. Specifically, the author believes that if educational punishment is to take the full dignity of students as its boundary and limit, then—it should delineate its principle boundary based on "human as an end," upholding students' "legislative dignity"; it should delineate its choice boundary by viewing students as students, aligning with their "abilities," and upholding their "will dignity"; and it should delineate its execution boundary by safeguarding fairness in school life, providing universal equality and individualized care, and upholding students' "achievement dignity."

**Keywords:** Educational Punishment; Boundary; Legislative Dignity.

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## 1. Delineating the Principle Boundary: Educational Punishment Upholds Students' "Legislative Dignity" with "Human as an End" as the Ultimate Basis

To delineate the principle boundary, educational punishment must uphold students' "legislative dignity" with "human as an end" as the principle and foundation, as this is where students' "legislative dignity" stems from. Education, being "education for humans," bases all normative understanding and expression of education on the principle of "human as an end." Thus, only when education adopts "human as an end" as its highest principle can it embody and uphold the dignity of students as human beings and ends in themselves, thereby committing to preserving their "legislative dignity." Educational punishment must also have human or students as its end, always treating students as ends rather than tools of punishment, especially avoiding using punished students as tools to deter others.

However, treating students as ends does not mean treating their entirety as ends but rather the humanity within their personalities as ends. Students' personalities encompass not only rational humanity but also the wildness akin to things obeying natural laws[1]. It is this wildness in their personalities that leads to many misconducts and mistakes in their lives. Therefore, education requires not only positive methods such as "teaching ethics, imparting knowledge, and resolving doubts" but also educational punishment to guide, regulate, and restrict this wildness. By doing so, students gain more possibilities for goodness as they progress towards future life. Besides restricting the wildness, educational punishment should aim to guide and develop the humanity within students' personalities, enabling them to bear and uphold their full dignity. This requires educational punishment to always view students as potential beings with humanity, rationality, and the responsibility and ability to account for their actions and faults, and to cultivate their rationality, sense of responsibility, and ability establishment and development.

## 2. Delineating the Choice Boundary: Educational Punishment Aligns with Students' Abilities, Upholding Their "Will Dignity"

In upholding students' full dignity, educational punishment must also delineate its choice boundary, aligning with students' "abilities," including their comprehension, reception, and action abilities.

Firstly, being consistent with students' understanding ability means that teachers cannot replace students' understanding with their own understanding of life, but should understand students in their life world and take corresponding disciplinary measures. [2] On the one hand, it is because teachers can only generate their own educational understanding in the life world of students, and on the other hand, it is because students are generally minors. When educational punishment treats students in the way of treating adults, students often do not understand the "improper" behavior in the eyes of teachers, nor do they understand the significance of educational punishment caused by their "improper" behavior. Therefore, educational punishment cannot exceed students' understanding ability and give students incomprehensible punishment.

Secondly, aligning with reception ability means educational punishment should not surpass students' reception abilities, acknowledging them as immature rational beings with limited reception abilities. When implementing punitive measures, teachers should assess and weigh students' reception abilities, considering the specific circumstances and factors affecting their abilities to avoid implementing punishments beyond their acceptable range.

Lastly, aligning with action ability means educational punishment should continuously focus on, maintain, and guide students' behavioral changes during and after punishment. As an educational means, the significance of educational punishment extends beyond the completion of punitive measures but lies in the positive behavioral changes it elicits in students afterward. These changes can be seen as the inherent purpose of educational punishment. Only when

students have the ability to achieve this inherent purpose can educational punishment be considered effective and appropriate. When students realize behavioral changes through their action abilities, they feel the dignity derived from these abilities. In other words, aligning educational punishment with students' action abilities aims to let them use these abilities to reassume and uphold their "will dignity."

### **3. Delineating the Execution Boundary: Educational Punishment Safeguards Justice in School Life, Upholding Students' "Achievement Dignity"**

"Achievement dignity" is closely related to school life as a public sphere and is an outward manifestation of dignity, representing students' perception of being respected by others. Educational punishment upholds this dignity by safeguarding the justice or fairness of school life, achieved through providing universal equality to students.

Universal equality is the principle of justice in school life, as "none of us or any category among us can claim more freedom or respect than others." [3] Therefore, "providing universal equality to students" becomes the basic requirement for educational punishment in safeguarding the justice of school life. Universal equality implies that students should be treated equally in educational punishment. If a student, A, is explicitly warned by a teacher for talking loudly in class, but another student, B, who commits the same offense receives no response, both students and others in the class have reason to believe they have been treated unequally. A has reason to think it's unfair that he was punished while B was not; B has reason to think the teacher's punishment of A was a sign of

concern, while ignoring B's offense is unfair. Other students, whether having experienced similar punishments or merely as observers, may also question this inconsistency and even doubt the teacher's authority in deciding punishments. For every student, they participate in school life with the same identity, and when faced with rules like educational punishment, they should be punished when they deserve it and not when they don't. When a student who deserves punishment is not punished, they have the right to feel their dignity is threatened. As Ido Weijers puts it, "If a child clearly crosses a boundary or does something forbidden, not punishing them is seen as divisive." [4] In short, educational punishment must be based on universal equality and follow this principle in practice, thereby upholding students' "achievement dignity" through equal treatment.

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