

## *Cross-Cultural Discipline*

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During the past two weeks, it was my privilege to teach first-year students about the American school system. I was asked to discuss the more general differences already covered in the *New Crown* series (school lunch, changing classrooms, uniforms, etc.). The students were already aware of these details and were unwilling to hear them a second time. I readjusted the lesson to focus on something extremely different about American schools, discipline.

Generally, the students at my school are well behaved and follow the rules accordingly, but as we near the closing of the school year I find it increasingly difficult to keep the class' attention. From my brief experience with the Japanese school system, there is no concept of punishment or penalties for misbehaving. Students have a responsibility to maintain the delicate balance of order within the school, as though each pupil were the fulcrum on which rests the success or failure of every other student's education. Failing to meet the requisite standards of behavior (and therefore the failure of other students, the class, teachers) results in social exile that is unbearable for a young adult in a culture based on an individual's duty to the group. Thus, most students are prevented from undesirable conduct.

However, there are a handful of "difficult" students, as they are called, that continually misbehave and upset the school's equilibrium. It is not obvious to me why they are not punished for their continual misconduct. Their actions are tolerated and often ignored by the faculty. They come and go from classes as they please, often spending entire days in the faculty room chatting with teachers and socializing. How is it that, in a system so established on the success of the school as a whole, these students are left to roam free on the fringe and willingly allowed to act without restraint?

Regulating students' behavior in the US is drastically different, especially concerning more difficult students. The individual's performance is stressed, rather than their function within the school as a whole. Therefore, punishment is given on a case-by-case basis as negative reinforcement. American schools have the authority and willingness to appropriate a student's time in order to maintain discipline among the student body. There is no precedent for good behavior as seen in Japanese schools (the success of the school as a whole). Instead, the students behave to avoid punishment. Certain behaviors like talking in class, lateness, sleeping, rowdiness, improper language and fighting can be punished with an hour or more of the students time. Repeated offenses can lead to more serious action like suspension, which involves stigmatizing a student's permanent record. The American system of discipline is not superior to the Japanese method, only different. However, concerning the more rebellious students in Japanese schools that will not respond to the normal discipline methods, I think a more American approach might be the "tough love" that these kids need. Similarly, a greater sense of duty and responsibility among American teenagers would work wonders for the US school system. A more collaborative effort might result in more attentive classes, better behaved students and more respect for the teachers inside and outside the classroom.