

Sociology Perspective on Student Maltreatment: Retrospective Case Study in a Japanese Elementary School

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Abstract : This is a sociological case study that analyzes a sequence of student maltreatment in an elementary school in Japan based on former students' narratives. Among various forms of student maltreatment, emotional maltreatment has received less attention. One reason for this is that emotional maltreatment is often considered a part of education and is difficult to capture in surveys. To discuss the difficulty of recognizing emotional maltreatment, it is necessary to consider the social background of the occurrence of student maltreatment. Therefore, from the perspective of the sociology of education, this study aims to clarify the process through which emotional maltreatment was embraced by students within a classroom in Japan. The focus of this study is a series of educational interactions by a homeroom teacher with 11 or 12-year-old students at a small public elementary school about 10 years ago. The research employs retrospective narrative data collected through interviews and autoethnography. The interviews were semi-structured, taking one to three hours each, with 11 young people who were enrolled in the same class as the researcher during their time in elementary school. Autoethnography, as a critical research method, contributes to existing theories and studies by providing a critical representation of the researcher's own experiences. Autoethnography enables researchers to collect detailed data that is hardly verbalized in interviews. Their research methods are well-suited for this research, which aims to break the taboos of focusing on the student's perspective instead of teachers' educational intention and to gain a deeper understanding of student maltreatment. This research result implies a pattern of emotional maltreatment, which is hard to be differentiated from education. In the case of this study, the teacher took a calm and kind behavior toward students after a threat and an explosion of anger. Former students often mentioned this behavior of the teacher and expressed emotional maltreatment as a part of education. It was not uncommon for the former students to offer positive evaluations of the teacher even though they experienced emotional damage. These findings are analyzed and discussed in conjunction with the deschooling theory and the cycle theory of violence. The deschooling theory provides a sociological explanation for how emotional maltreatment can be overlooked in society. The cycle theory of violence, developed within the context of domestic violence, explains how violence between romantic partners can be tolerated due to prevailing social norms. Analyzing the case in association with these two theories highlights the characteristics of teachers' behaviors that rationalize maltreatment education and impede students from escaping from emotional maltreatment. This study deepens our understanding of the causes of student maltreatment and provides a new perspective for future qualitative and quantitative research. Furthermore, since this research is based on the sociology of education, it has the potential to increase research from the fields of pedagogy and sociology, in addition to psychology and social welfare.

Keywords : emotional maltreatment, education, student maltreatment, Japan

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