The Advocacy and Solution of Conflict Between School Management and Teachers' Labor Rights: A Case Study

Chun-Hsiang CHEN* and Shih-Show CHEN
No150, Sec. 3, Binhai Rd., Tamsui Dist., New Taipei City, Taiwan
*Corresponding author

Keywords: Industrial social work, Radical social work, Advocacy.

Abstract. This empirical research papers focus on practice of University teachers fought for labor rights. Taiwan's higher education expansion due to the reform policy has resulted in market-oriented of higher education and tighter control of faculty on campus, etc. These greatly limit the university academic autonomy, and create great challenge and pressure upon career development of university faculty. Starting from classroom chair for instructor, an action research advocacy by author carried out inside and outside school, has concluded that the employers’ oppression on professors’ labor rights is even higher than that on academic autonomy. Protection of labor right for university faculty has become urgent issues in workplace. Furthermore, method to invoke consciousness of oppressed professor, as well as various types of advocacy for labor issues taken by teachers’ union in the form of social work are new paths to be considered in the field of social work relating workplace in Taiwan.

Introduction

A researcher of this article has nearly 20 years of teaching experience at university. The corresponding author begins serving at Department of Social Work in the university under this study about two years ago. Under study was originally a kind of Community College recruiting junior high and high school graduates, and grant associate degree. The school upgrade as a university in the wave of higher education expansion due to Taiwan education reform in the last 10 years. In addition to some of the administrative controls problems of the school (including controls of teachers and students), the researchers find an interesting condition: Why there are always shortages or damaged chairs for instructors in classrooms? In addition the authors have observed that: the solution of teachers in the university facing the situation of missing chair is to use students’ desks as chair, or simply to use student chair. As the observation of the school by the main authors for more than 2 years, talks about broken or missing instructor chairs between colleagues are never heard of. Therefore, what is the mindset of teachers not to face the problem in workplace and why, are highly interesting in the study.

Background and Literature Review

Since the 1990s the beginning of private and official education reform movement in Taiwan, rapid expansion of higher education has resulting 160 universities in this country. University and college students in the proportion, compared with the OECD countries, has been ranked top [1]. Beside a lot of criticism against rapid expansion of higher education, more serious situation such as stagnation of government investment for education, market-oriented thinking, are making greater problems for higher education system than problems of control over the number of university. [2]. Taiwan university teachers (especially private schools) facing serious degrading of academic autonomy and oppression of their labor rights are indicated by lack of supervision over private schools and increase of labor oppression such as poor teacher’s basic working conditions and laws, poor labor rights protection, salaries and retirement, harsh teacher evaluation due to law and administrative action, atypical employment relationships. [3].
Freire believed that human nature could only be guided in the right direction through the development of critical consciousness. Critical consciousness includes awareness, critical and transformation. Critical consciousness, in Freire’s definition, not only on behalf of a way of cognition, but also a valuable meaning of life. Only through appropriate educational methods, critical consciousness can be developed, but also conscious awakening and liberation of the people and democratic society without domination could become. His pedagogy of the oppressed, in the educational process of consciousness, apply the problem-posing teaching method in which the educated and the trainer may have a role reversal situation, that is, teachers become students, student becomes teacher [4] [5].

Radical perspective social work, developed in the 1930s, emphasizing that the structural factors of capitalist political economy is source of unfair, oppressive and alienation. Therefore the solution is to invoke consciousness of the client, and to encourage participation in the case of social movements to break the main structural element of unfairness [6].

Bailey and Brake (1980) suggest that social workers should be aware of the main sources of social alienation and oppression of client, and focus on insufficiency of resources [7], and Rojek elt. claims that the idea held by the society and the world are formed by conversation and dialogues [8]. In addition, the idea of against oppression is same for empowerment and advocacy, radical perspective or Freire. Through dialogue and praxis and enhancement of client’s conscientization, social justice will eventually be fulfilled. Typeset sub-subheadings in medium face italic and capitalize the first letter of the first word only. Section numbers to be in roman.

As teachers labor issues surfaced, teachers’ unions at all levels (inside and outside of school) provide the most direct assistance to teachers suffering oppression and loosing interests. But teachers’ unions in school level facing difficulties such as establishment threshold or maintenance and operation is common [3]. Although experienced union cadres have the ability to instantly solve the teachers' labor (mostly decrees) issues, but social work perspective in workplace suggest broader career development, benefits planning, and comprehensive career planning and development in addition to the employment relationship and labor rights [9]. Although currently the field of social work in the workplace is still dominated by EAPs and has been criticized ideologically, development of occupational social worker not employed by school and capable of planning all kinds of programs dealing with problems faced by teachers is also a new direction with of considering.

**Methods and Procedures**

Action Research is closely related to social work. Firstly, this concept is created and applied by J. Collier in community work of Indian community in 1945, and by the other pioneer K. Lewin who characterizing Action Research as “a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action”, using a process of “a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action”[10].

Altrichter, Posch & Somekh (1993) divided Action Research into four stages: (1) Finding a starting point; (2) Clarifying the situation; (3) Developing action strategies and putting them into practice; (4) Making teachers’ knowledge public. They clarifying the endless cycling process of the situation and developing action strategies and putting them into practice and identify the close relationship between action and reflection [11].

The research field is the college of researcher; target in the advocacies included internal and external administrative authorities and person possessing power and the related (mainly union members) classroom teachers and student of researcher.

From the starting point to struggle for instructor chairs in classroom, the researchers conducted the following three aspects of rights: (1) for internal and external administrative procedures; (2) for internal advocacies in teachers’ union; (3) for practicing advocacies of social work students while condition is suitable. In the advocacy process, researchers get response from participants and through
discussions and self-reflection and repeatedly clarifying the situation and adjust action strategies by researchers and union members, and propaganda to union members depending on the development of action.

**Research Process and Finding**

Related practices of action taken by researchers from September 2015 to February 2016 are as follow:

1. Requesting school administration to provide or to repair instructor chairs through formal procedures:
   (1) At the end of September, researcher accompanied by teachers’ union members met with the executive vice president, explaining the importance of instructor chair as an important part of classroom facilities and to request attention and improvement. No action taken by school administration following the meeting.
   (2) In October, a formal proposal rose in the department meeting for repairing and supplement instructors chair in classroom. The official proposal, as administrative operations in Taiwan university administrative processes, formally as a record of the department meeting went through the electronic administrative document system processes and finally signed by the president and post on school administration web page. As the researchers expected, in the process from department meeting resolution to long signoff processes through electronic administrative document system, no positive response has taken by administrator in any levels including president in charge. And bursar who takes the main responsibility for this issue replied rather strange answer.

2. Advocacy taken among teachers during the long signoff process: includes advocacy and discussion inside the teachers 'unions, such as interviews, propaganda through communications software (Line) in small group and teachers' e-mail system which covering wider range. Propaganda focuses on disregard of the needs of teachers and variety of improper exploitation taken from administrative side. The teachers unions want to understand the attitude of the school administration in responding to the long-neglected issue of instructor chair.

3. Advocacy in researcher’s classes for instructor chair during the long signoff process: As researcher taught "Sociology", "Social Policy and Legislation,” and other subjects in social work department in the same semester, the issue of instructor chair in the classroom is taken as living example for class, and applied in topics like "justice", "advocacy" and "social fait accompli?” in two courses.

4. Expand advocacy through external power tension: The introduction of external resources as well as changes in policy and legislation are emphasized in advocacy methods of social work.

Therefore, researchers and teachers unionists performed a variety of advocacy in different ways through external supervisory authority. For example: petition to the superintendent and investigation staff from Ministry of Education, related statements for officials conducting school evaluation of the university by Ministry of Education.

When formal requests are raised for the need of resources in workplace, neglect from administrator is often. And the problem did not get resolved. But when the external power is able to guide the school and having real influence, the school will pay attention to such needs and advocacy. This process appears twice, one to respond to the needs of teachers and another to respond to the needs of students. And both case is due to the school worried about continued engagement of external powers and it impact upon school.

In the case of instructor chair, since the university is taking school evaluation at the end of 2015, teacher unionists organize and provide relevant information reference for the evaluation committee, and this may result in poor performance in school evaluation, so that the school had to be valued and must seek to improvement, and therefore before the 2016 spring semester, each classroom has quietly added a new chair for instructor, as if each of the strongly advocated statement from administration during the first few months of the long signoff process are all disappear.

On the same day of school evaluation, students in the class of 2-years-reflux-education(junior, study in this school during their first semester), taught by researchers and has learn about advocacy,
made a lot of suggestions and demands to the school principal, including hardware issue such as lack of equipment locker, dilapidated classroom equipment .. And so on.

Immediate administration response to the students are taken, including transposed the class to the newest classrooms as privileges, purchase a locker unprecedented for the class.

**Conclusion and Suggestions**

University facilities should be provided to facilitate the teaching and research, which was originally the basic operation of any university. However in the current special situation in Taiwan, some must to achieve through relevant advocacy, the main aspect of the question here is as follows:

1. The level of consciousness, awareness of power clamp and awakening of consciousness: the layers of power clamp have become the core of the daily operations of higher education in Taiwan. After the "failure" of the higher education reform in the 1990s, whether policy makers, school managers, university teachers and students, were disappointingly turn back to conservative direction in the level of consciousness. These ideas and actions of the conservative and backward, to a great extent is the result of clamp on teachers’ right in higher education policy and law in Taiwan today. As shown in this study, in the process when the researchers take iterative advocacy and actions, teachers (and even union members or cadres) often wait and see, even holding on servative attitude and opposite position to union action. Foucault believes that power is technically extend not only through formal rules, and also through micro-power not knowing by the parties. Because all kinds of micro-powers construct the individual episteme ideas, actions, yet the parties do not aware of it. So, Paulo Freire's view is worth the teachers’ union cadres to learn on awakening of the oppressed and the establishment of Critical Consciousness.

2. On the policy side, Taiwan's education authorities and school operators focus on private interests as the core cooperatively constructed the chaos in higher education: higher education in Taiwan is facing a high risk of transformation when, ironically, it is precisely the management thinking and Education privatization of these policy makers, supervisor (Ministry of Education) and the actors (schools perpetrators) leading Taiwan's higher education into such a high-risk situation.

3. The action aspect, extending of the power of the teachers union is the key to sustainable operation and development of Taiwan University: the individual teacher's actions often end up as becoming the victim of conspiracy under the authority, the success of action requires the efforts of individual teacher cooperate with teachers' unions.

**Discussion and Suggestions:**

1. Ways to establish and break the power: In this case, the teacher get their instructor's chair, not entirely because of the administration of school management really seriously considers the question of justice for all teachers and students of university operations and interests. Instead, the final result (teachers get their instructors chairs) is still mainly an outcome of thinking of private interests and the Managerialism; that is, on the one hand the school must avoided interest loss by its measures during school evaluation.

2. Who is the unqualified? teachers or managers: In the expansion process of higher education in Taiwan for the last 20 years, a popular social statement being criticized and often become a guide "against" teachers is: "As university expand too fast, so that academic level of teachers and student are degrading, it is necessary to take extreme measures to adjust the number of universities and the number of faculty. If true, the first to be review is the competency issues of university principals and senior director. Because, whether the faculty qualifications, the number of published papers are required and a variety of academic/non-academic activities were asked to engage, as well as "World University Rankings" preferred by Taiwan's Ministry of Education, university teachers after the expansion period deserves qualified in such argument. Instead, as elite of academic autonomy leaders on campus, the manager’s experience, habitus and understanding toward university education ... etc. such competence issue worth additional in-depth study.

3. The class of university teachers "just is labor": in the survey of social class in Taiwan over the years, university professors often enjoy a high socio-economic status.
Yet, after Taiwan's education reform, university professors become the target boot due to all kinds of reality mentioned above and intentionally or unintentionally influences from social atmosphere. From the perspective of social work, people who enjoyed high socioeconomic status still need of social welfare services. Thus, teachers’ workers in abnormal university environment acting through sustained advocacy of different topics and conduct internal and external links to ensure labor rights are necessary and urgent today in Taiwan.

4. Deepening and radical orientation in the occupational social work: from the argument Marxist radical social work, employee in the workplace hired and bound by employers may face exploitation, oppression, particularly for teachers in such higher education industry of capitalization and market-oriented in Taiwan. This paper argues that university teachers' union cadres who, in fact, served as another "Occupational social worker." in developing. The practitioners should consider the characteristics of different universities and different topics, each with different design strategies and methods advocacy. The introduction of social work methods will bring new life to these emerging workplace and labor rights and social work issues.

5. Students joint action: Because of the particularity of the teaching profession and university mission, advocacy for teachers (union members and non-union members) and students are equally important. Therefore, students must be properly educated in perspective and as the core of teaching and research university same as professors, so as not to become a victim of higher education under the chaos in Taiwan.

References