TEACHER EMPOWERMENT
AS PERCEIVED BY TEACHERS IN HONG KONG

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ABSTRACT

The Hong Kong Government first introduced school-based management (SBM) to the education profession in 1991, but little attention has been paid on the role of teachers in school reforms. Under SBM, teachers are key players in determining school policies and practices. It is believed that teachers' dedication and performance are the most important factors in determining the quality of school education. This research paper represents an exploratory investigation of school teachers' perceptions of teacher empowerment in the context of Hong Kong. The research questions that guided this study were: (1) how do the teachers perceive and understand the relationship between teacher empowerment and SBM, and (2) how do the teachers perceive the essential conditions necessary for teacher empowerment? A questionnaire survey was adopted to collect the required data. The teachers' perceptions were assessed through a written survey consisting of 37 statements of which 14 statements concerning SBM, the empowerment of teachers, and the relationships between SBM and empowerment. The other 23 statements were set to tape the respondents' opinion on their work and working environment with the hope that this would reveal their attitudes towards the essential conditions for empowerment. From the research findings, it is evident that the teacher respondents only had a rather superficial knowledge of SBM and the relationship between SBM and teacher empowerment. Moreover, they only had a weak understanding of teachers' role under SBM and rather resisted to accept the new roles as discussed in the SBM literature. However, it is quite encouraging that certain favorable conditions for empowerment at the teacher level did exist as reflected by the respondents' opinions towards their work and working environment. (Contains 9 tables, 20 references, 2 appendices)

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INTRODUCTION

Education reform is an issue which interests almost every country. Like other developed countries in the world, Hong Kong has undergone a huge amount of educational reforms since the early 1990s in response to the public's concern about the quality of school education. The Hong Kong Government first introduced the "quality movement" in 1991 with the publication of the *School Management Initiative* (SMI). According to Dimmock (2000, p. 193), "[the] SMI restructuring policy gives each school greater flexibility and responsibility for managing its own affairs in return for rendering greater accountability for its performance to the central bureaucracy as well as to newly empowered school management committees." Apparently, the SMI was aimed at introducing: (1) a system of school–based management (SBM) to local schools (Dowson *et al.*, 2000), and (2) more teacher participation in school administration (Cheng, 2002, p. 50). Six years later in 1997, the Education Commission presented its Report No. 7 (ECR7), titled *Quality School Education,* to the government. The ECR7 was generally regarded as a set of far-reaching policy proposals to improve the school system under the quest for quality education.

With several years of actual experience, and as more and more responsibilities were devolved to schools in the use of public funds, the government considered that the time is ripe to set out a more clearly defined institutional framework for SBM, and to apply SBM on a wider scale. In 1999, an Advisory Committee on School-based Management (ACSBM) was set up to develop a framework of governance for SBM. Based on the recommendations

made by the ACSBM, the government drafted the Bill about the SBM governance framework and tabled it to the territory's legislature in 2002. Finally, the Bill was passed in mid-2004 and came into operation on January 1, 2005. To protect the rights of participation of key stakeholders in school management, the SBM Ordinance requires all aided schools to establish an incorporated management committee (IMC) to manage the school. It also stipulates clearly the functions and powers of school sponsoring bodies and the IMCs.

From the SMI to the SBM Ordinance, the local education profession has been engaged in vigorous debates concerning the implementation of SBM. However, these debates have mainly focused on issues such as school leadership, school autonomy, quality of school personnel, and performance indicators. Teacher empowerment, which is one of the most popular issues in Western SBM literature, has received little attention. Teachers are the key actors in the education arena, without whom reform measures are unlikely to work. It is unquestionable that teachers' dedication and performance are the most important factors in determining the quality of school education. This study is an exploratory investigation of school teachers' perceptions of teacher empowerment in the context of Hong Kong. No similar study has been conducted in Hong Kong. The research questions that guided this descriptive study were: (1) how do the teachers perceive and understand the relationship between teacher empowerment and SBM, and (2) how do the teachers perceive the essential conditions necessary for teacher empowerment? From the research findings, this study broadens the understanding of factors that may impede or promote empowerment of teachers in the context of Hong Kong.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SBM, defined as the decentralization of decision making authority to the school site, is one of the most popular strategies that came out of the 1980s school reform movement took place in the United States (Oswald, 1995). SBM is expected to improve schools through decentralization of administration, participation by staff, parents and the community in the administration of the school, making schools more effective and competitive (Phillips, 1997). However, Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1994, p. 1) remind practitioners that SBM holds the promise of enabling schools to better address students' needs and it is not an end in itself. They claim that this promise is more likely if a "high-involvement" model of SBM is followed. This model envisions teachers and principals being trained and empowered to make decisions related to management and performance. In the context of SBM, "shared decision making" (SDM) refers generally to the involvement of teachers in the processes of school-wide decision making (David, 1993; Weiss, 1993). Structures or mechanisms for SDM give teachers a voice in what had largely been principal-led administration. Wohlstetter and Mohrman (1993, p. 6) point out that the transition to SBM cannot be understood simply as a transfer of power from the central authority to the school site. The implementation of SBM or SDM should go along with "teacher empowerment," providing power to those who traditionally have not had a role in managing schools.

"Empowerment" as a term has been frequently used in management circles since the 1980s. It requires individuals to make appropriate decisions that result in improved processes or products, which, in turn, contributes to organizational objectives (Scarnati & Scarnati, 2002, p. 115). Although the empowerment management approach emerged from the business world, the concept of teacher empowerment parallels employee empowerment in a business.

In the United States, there has been an increasing acceptance of the idea that good schools must treat their teachers with respectful regard, allowing them to exercise their judgment in matters related to instruction as well as school-wide issues that extend beyond their individual classrooms (Zeichner, 1991, p. 365). Advocates see teacher empowerment as a means of overcoming the existing administrative order and gaining increased control of the profession. The involvement of teachers in the process of school-wide decision making means the establishment of bonds to connect teachers with other teachers, their principal, the parents, students and community. They also argue that granting new respect to teachers may help to attract and retain more capable teachers (Bolin, 1989, p. 81). Oswald (1995) claims that teacher empowerment is a cornerstone of teacher professionalism.

Empowerment can be thought of as a process whereby teachers develop their competence to take charge of their own work and resolve their own problems. Various researchers have looked into the process of empowerment and concluded a number of conditions that are essential to the implementation of teacher empowerment at the teacher level in any particular school. This study has attempted to group these conditions into six dimensions as below. The first four dimensions of conditions can also be regarded as human-side conditions/factors, while the remaining two are operational conditions/factors.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is designed to produce a psychological state within which teachers feel more in charge of their own work. In effect, empowerment is built around individual teachers' subjective experience of being empowered. Spreitzer (in Potterfield, 1999, pp. 49–50) explains this subjective experience in four ways: (a) meaningfulness: individuals find

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meaning in their role involvement; (b) efficacy: individuals feel efficacious with respect to their capacity and ability to perform; (c) determination: individuals have a sense of determination with regard to specific means to achieve a desired outcome; and (d) control: individuals believe that they have control over desired outcomes, that they can have an impact on the larger environment.

MOTIVATIONS

As a motivational construct, empowerment can be viewed as individual and personal. Empowered teachers must feel a sense of personal worth, perceiving themselves as having power and the ability to control and deal effectively with the situations that they encounter. Thus, empowerment is about discretion, autonomy, power and control (Lashley, 1999, p. 170). The strongest motivation is intrinsic: The reward comes from the process, the experience of doing the job.   Extrinsic rewards tend to be far less motivating in the long run.

PROFESSIONALIZATION

Maeroff (1988, pp. 6–7) views empowerment as a term synonymous with professionalization. Hence it is important that teachers work in an environment in which they act as a professional and are treated as a professional.   While identifying teacher status, knowledge, and access to decision making as important elements of empowerment, Maeroff provides further elaboration of these concepts: (a) improved status: it is fundamental to empowerment, since without it teachers are not likely to experience a sense of power; (b) increased knowledge: making teachers more knowledgeable is an important step in enhancing their power; and (c) access to decision making: teachers must connect not only with each

other but also with administrators around important decisions.

TRUST

Trust, as pointed out by Terry (n.d.), is the foundation of shared governance, which provides the impetus for teacher leadership. Trust should automatically be granted upon arrival at a school, and when it prevails, teachers feel free to be creative and to become risk takers. The development of trust is a function of an organization's capacity to create a supportive environment within which it can develop over time. It is rooted in interactions built around common values and attitudes (Appelbaum et al, 1999, p. 249). Communication between school leaders and teachers is thus essential to the creation of such an environment (Terry, n.d.).

AUTONOMY

A common thread in school research is the importance of autonomy to the individual teacher or work teams (Dondero, 1997, p. 218). Teachers need a sense of ownership within the organization. Greater job autonomy leads to greater perceived control and greater empowerment (Honold, 1997, p. 204). Autonomy in schools is therefore crucial to school effectiveness and the success of educational reform. What often hinders the provision of autonomy to teachers is the conflict between professionalization and bureaucratization.

Information sharing, in the culture of empowerment, means leaders are willing to share the information they have. With greater information, teachers are compelled to act with greater responsibility (Blanchard et al., 2001, p. 11). Furthermore, school leaders will gain the trust of their teachers, who then feel trusted by the leadership.

The study reported on here was designed within the context of the literature covered above.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The purpose of the study was to examine the teachers' perceptions and understanding of teacher empowerment. Secondly, it was also aimed at looking for the essential conditions necessary for empowering teachers. A questionnaire survey was adopted to collect the required data. The teachers' perceptions were assessed through a written survey consisting of 37 statements of which 14 statements concerning SBM, the empowerment of teachers, and the relationships between SBM and empowerment. The other 23 statements were set to tape the respondents' opinion on their work and working environment with the hope that this would reveal their attitudes towards the essential conditions for empowerment. The full list of survey statements is provided in appendix A. The respondent was asked the degree he/she agreed or disagreed with the statements. The respondent had to indicate his/her feeling on a 5-point Likert-type rating scale with four and five indicating the positive responses (agree, strongly agree), three indicating a neutral response (no opinion), and one and two indicating the negative responses (strongly disagree, disagree).

152 teachers were drawn from the researcher's personal contact list constructed from his previous work as educational researcher. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter that clearly stated the nature and purpose of the study. The letter stressed that the confidentiality of the individual responses would be maintained. A self-addressed postage-paid envelope was attached to each questionnaire with instructions to the teachers to complete the questionnaire, seal it in the envelope, and return it to the researcher within the prescribed period. The questionnaires were posted in late December 2004; returns were received within the first two weeks of January 2005. Of the 152 questionnaires distributed, 110 (return rate = 72.4 percent) were returned of which all of them were used for the study and further analysis.

DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS

Since there were a few missing responses on demographic characteristics, frequencies may not sum to total number of respondents. Of the 110 respondents, 83 (75.5 percent) were female, 26 (23.6 percent) were male. 35 teachers (31.8 percent) reported that they were in the 20 years-old group, 37 (33.6 percent) in the 30s group, 23 (20.9 percent) in the 40s group, and 11 (10 percent) in the 50s group. 103 teachers (93.6 percent) were teaching in primary schools; 4 (3.6 percent) were secondary school teachers. The responding teachers had been teaching on average 12.36 years (SD = 8.78), taught in their current school for 7.17 years (SD = 5.99). Nine teachers chose not to respond to these two items. 70 percent of the respondents reported that they were doing part-time studies. 31 teachers (28.2 percent) had enrolled in B.Ed. programs, 4 (3.6 percent) in Postgraduate Diploma in Education programs, 22 (20 percent) in M.Ed. programs, and 20 (18.2 percent) in other in-service training

programs.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The two research questions will provide the framework for presenting the findings. Statements 1 to 14 in the questionnaire were concerned about the respondents' opinion on teacher empowerment, whilst statements 15 to 37 were about respondents' work and working environment. The following sections provide a summary of the quantitative analysis of the survey. The descriptive statistics of mean, standard deviation and frequency were used in the analysis. The means and standard deviations appeared in the following analysis reflect the reasonable values of central tendency and variability.

THE OBJECTIVES AND UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF SBM

Table 1 presents the summary of statistics on the respondents' perceptions of the objectives and underlying principles of SBM. 82.7 percent of the respondents agreed with Statement 2: "SBM's essence is school-level autonomy plus participatory decision making." This statement had the highest mean rating (3.88) and the lowest SD (0.60) among the five statements here. However, only 63.6 percent of them could relate this to the democratization of working procedures in schools (Statement 4, M=3.58); and 59 percent to the involvement of teachers in the process of school-wide decision making (Statement 5, M=3.47). Quite a lot of the teachers agreed that SBM was a means of improving school performance (Statement 1, M=3.74, 80 percent), and its goal was to empower school staff to solve the problems particular to their schools (Statement 3, M=3.75, 72.8 percent). This result reveals the fact that most

teachers did have a good knowledge of the objectives of SBM, but felt less comfortable with such wordings as democratization and school-wide decision making.

Table 1. Respondents' perceptions of the objectives and underlying principles of SBM (N=110)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)				
			1	2	3	4	5
01	3.74	0.70	1 (0.9)	9 (8.2)	12 (10.9)	84 (76.4)	4 (3.6)
02	3.88	0.60	0 (0.0)	4 (3.6)	15 (13.6)	81 (73.6)	10 (9.1)
03	3.75	0.65	0 (0.0)	5 (4.5)	25 (22.7)	72 (65.5)	8 (7.3)
04	3.58	0.89	2 (1.8)	13 (11.8)	25 (22.7)	59 (53.6)	11 (10.0)
05	3.47	0.82	0 (0.0)	18 (16.4)	27 (24.5)	60 (54.5)	5 (4.5)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SBM AND THE TEACHER

Table 2 outlines the respondents' perceptions of the relationship between SBM and the teacher. The means of the self-ratings by the teachers on the four statements here were ranging from 3.21 to 3.45. They were the lowest ones as compared with the mean ratings of the other 10 statements (Statements 1-5 and 10-14) written to tape the respondents' opinion on teacher empowerment. Though Statement 6: "Teacher professionalism will be promoted under SBM" had the highest mean rating (M=3.45, 54.5 percent of the respondents agreed) among the four statements, teachers were unclear about the possible benefits they would get when implementing SBM. These benefits might include promoting job satisfaction and teachers' morale (Statement 7, M=3.21), becoming school leaders (Statement 8, M=3.40), and gaining a sense of ownership (Statement 9, M=3.34).

Table 2. Respondents' perceptions of the relationship between SBM and the teacher (N=110)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)				
			1	2	3	4	5
06	3.45	0.80	3 (2.7)	9 (8.2)	38 (34.5)	56 (50.9)	4 (3.6)
07	3.21	0.93	3 (2.7)	24 (21.8)	35 (31.8)	43 (39.1)	5 (4.5)
08	3.40	0.85	4 (3.6)	13 (11.8)	30 (27.3)	61 (55.5)	2 (1.8)
09	3.34	0.95	4 (3.6)	20 (18.2)	26 (23.6)	55 (50.0)	5 (4.5)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SBM AND TEACHER EMPOWERMENT

In general, as shown in Table 3, the five statements here received high rating from the respondents. Particularly, 83.7 percent of the respondents agreed that organizational effectiveness and teacher empowerment were related to each other (Statement 12, M=3.83). 70 percent agreed that the implementation of SBM should go along with teacher empowerment (Statement 10, M=3.65). 73.7 percent agreed that teacher empowerment, by granting new respects to teachers, could help to retain capable teachers (Statement 14, M=3.73). Nonetheless, the respondents were somewhat doubtful about whether teacher empowerment was a change of management philosophy (Statement 11, M=3.55, 65.4 percent of the respondents agreed) and teacher empowerment might help teachers to develop their competence (Statement 13, M=3.64, 69.1 percent of the respondents agreed).

Table 3. Respondents' perceptions of the relationship between SBM and teacher empowerment (N=110)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)				
			1	2	3	4	5
10	3.65	0.82	2 (1.8)	10 (9.1)	21 (19.1)	69 (62.7)	8 (7.3)
11	3.55	0.83	3 (2.7)	10 (9.1)	25 (22.7)	67 (60.9)	5 (4.5)
12	3.83	0.72	2 (1.8)	6 (5.5)	10 (9.1)	83 (75.5)	9 (8.2)
13	3.64	0.83	3 (2.7)	8 (7.3)	23 (20.9)	68 (61.8)	8 (7.3)
14	3.73	0.99	6 (5.5)	7 (6.4)	16 (14.5)	63 (57.3)	18 (16.4)

Statements 15 to 37 were concerned about the respondents' work and working environment. They were written according to the six dimensions of essential conditions for teacher empowerment. The analysis below follows this conceptual framework. As shown in the ninth column in Tables 4 to 9, the overall mean ratings of the six dimensions were all above the scale's neutral midpoint (Psychological empowerment = 3.34; motivations = 3.53; professionalization = 3.65; trust = 3.33; autonomy = 3.52; information sharing = 3.40).

PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT

Table 4 presents the summary statistics on the respondents' attitudes towards psychological empowerment. A remarkable percentage of the respondents (91.8 percent) agreed with Statement 16: "I believe that I have the ability to get things done" (M=3.98, SD=0.47). Nearly 60 percent of the teachers agreed that they had taken an active role in the operation of the school (Statement 15, M=3.56). Most interestingly, 38.2 percent of the teachers disagreed that they were decision makers, and 27.3 percent chose "no opinion" on this (Statement 17, M=2.93). Together with the less confident responses to Statement 5

which concerned with the involvement of teachers in school-wide decision making, the teachers were psychologically not prepared to recognize themselves as decision makers. Other than this, only 47.3 percent of the respondents felt that they had control over their work (Statement 18, M=3.12), and 39.9 percent believed that their schools were empowering workplaces (Statement 19, M=3.13).

Table 4. Respondents' perceptions of empowering conditions: Psychological empowerment (N=110)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)					Dimensional Rating
			1	2	3	4	5	
15	3.56	0.88	1 (0.9)	14 (12.7)	29 (26.4)	54 (49.0)	12 (10.9)	
16	3.98	0.47	0 (0.0)	2 (1.8)	7 (6.4)	92 (83.6)	9 (8.2)	
17	2.93	1.05	9 (8.2)	33 (30.0)	30 (27.3)	33 (30.0)	5 (4.5)	M=3.34
18	3.12	1.00	6 (5.5)	29 (26.4)	23 (20.9)	50 (45.5)	2 (1.8)	
19	3.13	0.87	4 (3.6)	23 (20.9)	39 (35.5)	43 (39.0)	1 (0.9)	

MOTIVATIONS

Table 5 shows the factors that motivated the respondents at work. Feeling herself/himself as part of the school was the most important factor to the teachers (Statement 22, M=3.85, 80 percent of the respondents agreed). But ironically, only 55.5 percent agreed that they were proud to work for their school (Statement 23, M=3.39). There were still about 63 percent of the teachers agreed that they were being motivated by job satisfaction (Statement 20, M=3.41) and intrinsic rewards (Statement 21, M=3.47).

Table 5. Respondents' perceptions of empowering conditions: Motivations (N=110)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)					Dimensional Rating
			1	2	3	4	5	
20	3.41	0.99	5 (4.5)	20 (18.2)	16 (14.5)	63 (57.3)	6 (5.5)	
21	3.47	0.89	5 (4.5)	11 (10.0)	25 (22.7)	65 (59.1)	4 (3.6)	M=3.53
22	3.85	0.77	2 (1.8)	5 (4.5)	15 (13.6)	73 (66.4)	15 (13.6)	
23	3.39	0.98	6 (5.5)	14 (12.7)	29 (26.4)	53 (48.2)	8 (7.3)	

PROFESSIONALIZATION

Table 6 figures out the respondents' attitudes towards professionalization. First, the overall mean rating on professionalization was the highest (3.65) among the six dimensions of conditions. Second, while the respondents strongly believed that they were professional teachers (Statement 24, M=3.99, 85.5 percent) and had contributed to the administration of their school (Statement 28, M=3.65, 64.5 percent), notably a smaller percentage of respondents agreed that they were treated as a professional (Statement 25, M=3.43, 56.3 percent). Third, the teachers also gave positive responses to Statement 26: "I have the respect of my colleagues" (M=3.76, 79.1 percent), but only 60 percent replied that their principals and colleagues would ask for their advice (Statement 27, M=3.47). Last, 67.3 percent of the respondents agreed that they had the opportunity to improve their professional knowledge in the school (Statement 29, M=3.58).

Table 6. Respondents' perceptions of empowering conditions: Professionalization (N=110)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)					Dimensional Rating
			1	2	3	4	5	
24	3.99	0.67	1 (0.9)	2 (1.8)	13 (11.8)	75 (68.2)	19 (17.3)	
25	3.43	0.95	5 (4.5)	13 (11.8)	30 (27.3)	54 (49.0)	8 (7.3)	
26	3.76	0.81	3 (2.7)	7 (6.4)	13 (11.8)	77 (70.0)	10 (9.1)	M=3.65
27	3.47	0.92	5 (4.5)	11 (10.0)	28 (25.5)	59 (53.6)	7 (6.4)	
28	3.65	0.93	2 (1.8)	12 (10.9)	25 (22.7)	54 (49.0)	17 (15.5)	
29	3.58	0.87	2 (1.8)	14 (12.7)	20 (18.2)	66 (60.0)	8 (7.3)	

TRUST

The overall mean rating on trust was the lowest (3.33) among the six dimensions of conditions. As shown in Table 7, the mean ratings on each of the three statements regarding the respondents' work were rather similar. The respondents' feelings about trust could be reflected by their answers. Parallel with the low mean rating on Statement 19 (M=3.13) of which only 39.9 percent of the respondents believed that their school was an empowering workplace, Statement 31: "I feel that I am working in a supportive environment" also received a mediocre rating (M=3.35, 57.2 percent agreed). In addition, nearly half of the respondents were neither having good interactions with the school management (Statement 30, M=3.32, 20 percent disagreed, 26.4 percent no opinion), nor feeling free to be innovative and to become risk takers (Statement 32, M=3.33, 17.2 percent disagreed, 32.7 percent no opinion).

Table 7. Respondents' perceptions of empowering conditions: Trust (N=110)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)					Dimensional Rating
			1	2	3	4	5	
30	3.32	0.95	6 (5.5)	16 (14.5)	29 (26.4)	55 (50.0)	4 (3.6)	
31	3.35	0.94	5 (4.5)	18 (16.4)	24 (21.8)	60 (54.5)	3 (2.7)	M=3.33
32	3.33	0.89	4 (3.6)	15 (13.6)	36 (32.7)	51 (46.4)	4 (3.6)	

AUTONOMY

Having the belief that they were professional teachers (Statement 24, M=3.99), and had the ability to get things done (Statement 16, M=3.98), 80 percent of the respondents felt that they were autonomous to plan their own work (Statement 33, M=3.76). While feeling they were part of the school (Statement 22, M=3.85), 77.2 percent of the teachers agreed that they worked with their colleagues to make the school better (Statement 34, M=3.76). The existing working procedures might be the factor that affected the autonomy of the respondents' work. Of the 110 teachers, only 48 were satisfied with the working procedures in their school (Statement 35, M=3.05, 43.6 percent).

Table 8. Respondents' perceptions of empowering conditions: Autonomy (N=110)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)					Dimensional Rating
			1	2	3	4	5	
33	3.76	0.66	2 (1.8)	4 (3.6)	16 (14.5)	84 (76.4)	4 (3.6)	
34	3.76	0.59	0 (0.0)	5 (4.5)	20 (18.2)	81 (73.6)	4 (3.6)	M=3.52
35	3.05	1.00	8 (7.3)	27 (24.5)	27 (24.5)	47 (42.7)	1 (0.9)	

Two statements were set for the information sharing dimension. The overall mean rating was 3.40, just higher than those of the psychological empowerment (3.34) and trust (3.33) dimensions. 60 percent of the teachers agreed that they were able to act with greater responsibilities when equipped with greater information (Statement 37, M=3.45). Nevertheless, totally 43.7 percent of the respondents had no opinion or disagreed with Statement 36: "School leaders are willing to share the crucial information they have" (M=3.35, 21 percent disagreed, 22.7 percent no opinion).

Table 9. Respondents' perceptions of empowering conditions: Information sharing (N=110)

Statement	Mean	SD	Frequency (%)					Dimensional Rating
			1	2	3	4	5	
36	3.35	0.98	6 (5.5)	17 (15.5)	25 (22.7)	57 (51.8)	5 (4.5)	M=3.40
37	3.45	0.88	3 (2.7)	15 (13.6)	26 (23.6)	61 (55.5)	5 (4.5)	

CONCLUSION

As supported by the survey findings, it is evident that the respondents only had a rather superficial knowledge of SBM and the relationship between SMB and teacher empowerment. First, they could only identify some general aims of both measures. Second, they only had a weak understanding of teachers' role under SBM and rather resisted to accept the new roles as discussed in the SBM literature. Third, the respondents were also unclear about the potential benefits they would get under SBM and teacher empowerment. This reflects the fact that the

Hong Kong Government had not been correctly oriented its focus of work on the education of teachers since 1991, the year the idea of SBM was first being introduced to the education profession. However, the prolonged disputes between some school sponsoring bodies and the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB) on the governance framework as proposed in the SBM Bill of 2002 might have some negative effects on the teachers' perceptions of SBM. The government should therefore try to readjust its work in the promotion and implementation of SBM. It is rather interesting that the government has chosen a low profile approach to introduce teacher empowerment to the education profession. Recently, as displayed on the EMB's *SBM Information* webpages, the education authority only presents a few lines about teacher empowerment to the profession for consideration (see appendix B). This is definitely not enough.

Though teacher empowerment has not attracted much public interest in the past and no schools have officially been required to execute similar measures, some favorable conditions at the teacher level for implementing empowerment were found in this study. With reference to the six dimensions of empowering conditions, the findings on the human-side factors of professionalization and motivations, and the operational factor of autonomy inform practitioners some existing foundations that can be used when realizing the concept of empowerment. First, the teachers had a sense of power for they confirmed their professional status and contributions to their school. Second, they had a sense of belonging as they felt that they were part of the school. Third, they also had a sense of ownership since they could plan their own work or team works.

Not surprisingly, to empower teachers, practitioners have to overcome certain difficulties. Most of the obvious barriers emerged from the dimensions of psychological empowerment, trust, and information sharing. Teacher empowerment means increasing the ability of teachers to influence those decisions that are important to the operation of schools. In the

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context of Hong Kong, it is difficult to make the transition to effective teacher involvement because there was a profound lack of trust in the teachers. Failure to create a sense of safety in their working environment will make teachers reluctant to make changes. This was further proved by the findings that school leaders were inclined not to share the crucial information they had with the teachers. Moreover, the government's negligence in educating teachers to understand the very nature of SBM also resulted in the teachers' lacking of psychological readiness to accept their new roles as decision makers.

Teachers' involvement in the process of school-wide decision making is considered as an effective strategy for substantial school reforms among recent school improvement researches. If teachers' perceptions of their involvement in school decisions are low, meaningful changes are less likely to occur. In concluding, the researcher would like to stress the need for local researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to further consider the strategies of implementing SBM, and placing teachers at the center of any policies regarding school changes.

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The objectives and underlying principles of SBM

01. SBM is a means of improving school performance.
02. SBM's essence is school-level autonomy plus participatory decision-making.
03. SBM's goal is to empower school staff by providing authority, flexibility, and resources to solve the educational problems particular to their schools.
04. SBM is a measure to democratize the working procedures in schools.
05. SBM refers to the involvement of teachers in the processes of school-wide decision making.

The relationship between SBM and the teacher

06. Teacher professionalism will be promoted under SBM.
07. SBM is positively related to teachers' job satisfaction, the morale of teachers and their enthusiasm for the school organization.
08. SBM may help teachers learn to accept more responsibilities as school leaders.
09. Through SBM, teachers will gain a sense of ownership in their workplace.

The relationship between SBM and teacher empowerment

10. The implementation of SBM should go along with teacher empowerment, providing power to those who traditionally have not had a role in managing schools.
11. Teacher empowerment representing a managerial shift with the decisions made by those working most closely with students rather than those at the top management.
12. Teacher empowerment rests primarily on a belief that organizational effectiveness is enhanced by site decision-making by teachers about problems of practice.
13. Teacher empowerment may help teachers to develop their competence to take charge of their own work and resolve their own problems.
14. Teacher empowerment may help to attract and retain more capable teachers via granting new respect to teachers.

Psychological empowerment

15. I take an active role in the operation of the school.
16. I believe that I have the ability to get things done.
17. I am a decision maker.
18. I have control over my work.
19. I believe that my school is an empowering workplace.

Motivations

20. I am satisfied with my work as a teacher.
21. I feel that I have received intrinsic rewards from the job.
22. I really feel part of the school.
23. I am proud to work for the school.

Professionalization

24. I believe that I am a professional teacher.
25. I am treated as a professional.
26. I have the respect of my colleagues.
27. The principal and other teachers solicit my advice.
28. I contribute to the administration of my school.
29. I have the opportunity to improve my professional knowledge in the school.

Trust

30. I have good interactions with the school management.
31. I feel that I am working in a supportive environment.
32. I feel free to be innovative and to become risk takers.

Autonomy

33. I can plan my own work.
34. I work with my colleagues to make the school better.
35. I am satisfied with the working procedures in the school.

Information sharing

36. School leaders are willing to share the crucial information they have.
37. With greater information, I am able to act with greater responsibilities.

APPENDIX B — THE CONTENTS OF TEACHER EMPOWERMENT AS WRITTEN ON THE EDUCATION AND MANPOWER BUREAU'S WEBSITE

Teacher Empowerment:

- Schools are recommended to develop a strategic plan for teacher professional development by taking into account teachers' former training background. The plan should promote shared lesson preparation and the use of collaborative action research as a strategy for inquiry and reflection.

- Teacher development should no longer be taken as a linear and sequential process with teachers attending courses to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills required to pass knowledge on to students.

- Multiple and diversified modes are now provided to support teachers' individual learning and collaborative learning both outside and inside schools on a continuous and interactive basis.

Source: The Education and Manpower Bureau website. Retrieved January 30, 2005, from http://www.emb.gov.hk/index.aspx?langno=1&nodeID=2075.