

**Stories Untold:
What Happened in Schools
During the Occupy Movement 2014?**

Summary of Preliminary Findings

28 October 2015

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I. Introduction

1. Background

- 1.1 The Occupy Movement had lasted for more than two months. The duration and large turnouts of students in the movement had not only made a significant mark in the history of Hong Kong, but also raised concerns of some parties on the role education plays in the youth's understanding of their citizen obligations to society and nation.
- 1.2 Social unrest is now everywhere over the world. However, the Occupy Movement 2014 in Hong Kong was unprecedented in many aspects. Among them, the prominent involvement of secondary school students was rather unusual, and many even suggested that this might herald a world trend. What schools, principals and teachers faced during the period was also unprecedented. What happened in schools indeed posed special challenges to the professional commitment and judgment among Hong Kong's educators.
- 1.3 While the reasons behind students' participation in the Occupy Movement could be many, school professionalism in handling class boycotts and student participation in the movement were questioned and challenged by some social and political parties. However, what happened in schools, especially from the perspectives of teachers and principals, are not all known and understood by society at large. Stories from hearsay prevail. Unfounded judgement of Hong Kong's schools and teachers has replaced rigorous study and delineation of the reality in those days. It is in this context that the Education Policy Unit at The University of Hong Kong, in collaboration with the Hong Kong Association of the Heads of Secondary Schools (HKAHSS), launch a study: *Stories Untold — What Happened in Schools During the Occupy Movement 2014?* (hereafter Study), to examine educators' and secondary students' perspectives towards the movement, measures taken by schools in response to the movement and the possible impact of the movement on future education. *Policy 21*, a reputed research social enterprise, undertakes the practical components of the Study.

2. Objectives

2.1 The objectives of the Study are threefold:

- (1) To investigate the extent of educators' and students' involvement in the period of Occupy Movement;
- (2) To examine the measures taken by secondary schools in response to the Occupy Movement; and
- (3) To explore the perceived impacts of the Occupy Movement on students and schools.

2.2 It is hoped that the Study will be able to contribute to a better understanding of what happened in secondary schools during the Occupy Movement, how school principals and teachers handled the incident, what impacts the Movements has brought to schools and students and what lessons are learnt.

2.3 This summary report presents the findings of the Study and is divided into three sections: (I) Introduction; (II) Study Methodology; and (III) Key Findings.

II. Study Methodology

3. Research Methodology

Study participants

- 3.1 The participants of the study include principals and class teachers of Secondary 5 and 6 from secondary schools in Hong Kong. Surveying principals and teachers from secondary schools would provide us with insider perspectives on how schools react to the movement.

Instrument and data collection

- 3.2 Self-administered questionnaires for principals and teachers were developed and piloted on 4 principals and 7 secondary teachers. Feedback given by the respondents was taken into consideration in the modification of questionnaire before distribution..
- 3.3 The questionnaires are anonymous. They were distributed to all secondary schools in Hong Kong. The completed questionnaires were collected in a drop-box/big envelope in each school and then collected by research assistants of the Study.
- 3.4 The questionnaire consists of 5 main sections:
- (1) Participants' background information (e.g., gender and age);
 - (2) Participants' perceived involvement and participation of the students in the Occupy Movement;
 - (3) Participants' rationales in handling situations in schools arisen from the Occupy Movement;
 - (4) Participants' perspectives on the possible impacts of the Occupy Movement on future education/education policy.
 - (5) Participants' understanding of the impacts from Occupy Movement;

Enumeration results

- 3.5 A total of 498 secondary schools were invited to participate in the Study, of which 168 agreed to participate. In total, 131 principals (hereafter “Principals”) and 1,411 teachers (hereafter “Teachers”) participated in the Study. Given that the Study was related to a sensitive issue and conducted towards the end of the school year when schools were extremely busy, the response is very encouraging.

Statistical analyses

- 3.6 Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the findings of the Study. Some percentages in the descriptive figures might not add up to the total of 100% due to rounding off. In the case of multiple answers, the total percentage might exceed 100%, since more than one answer could be selected by the respondents.
- 3.7 With an effective sample size of 131 Principals and 1,411 Teachers based on simple random sampling, the precision level of the estimates on Principals and Teachers is within the range of plus or minus 8.6 and 2.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level respectively.

III. Key Findings

4. Participation in the Occupy Movement

Class boycott

- 4.1 The majority of the Principals (90.8%) indicated that there were students who asked for class boycott in the school whereas the students of 9.2% Principals did not indicated so. Among those Principals whose students asked for class boycott in the school, 73.9% of the Principals expressed that they allowed their students to take part in class boycott in the school only if they had their parents' consent, 20.2% stated that they just allowed their students to conduct/participate in class boycott in the school without requiring parents' consent, while 1.7% stated that their students were not allowed to conduct/participate in any class boycott in the school. On the other hand, about 84.7% of the Principals indicated that there were students who opposed class boycott (see Table 4.1).
- 4.2 The majority of the Teachers (86.2%) indicated that there were students who asked for class boycott in the schools whereas 13.8% of Teachers did not indicated so. Among those Teachers whose students asked for class boycott in the school, 66.9% of the Teachers expressed that their students could take part in class boycott in the school only if they had parents' consent, 28.7% stated that their students were allowed to do so with no parents' consent, and 1.2% stated that their students were not allowed to conduct/participate in class boycott in the school. Furthermore, about 82.0% of the Teachers indicated that there were students who opposed class boycott (see Table 4.1).
- 4.3 The majority of the Principals (89.3%) and Teachers (85.1%) indicated that class boycott occurred within the school premises, and among them, slightly more than half of the Principals and the Teachers reported that during the class boycott, their students who chose to participate in class boycott held discussion meetings within the school premises (Principals: 61.5%, Teachers: 57.6%) or did self-study within the school premises (Principals: 53.0%, Teachers: 59.8%) (see Table 4.2).
- 4.4 Among those who indicated that class boycott occurred within the school premises, 60.7% of the Principals and 63.2% of the Teachers stated the duration of class boycott was 2 to 5 days, while 30.8% of the Principals and 24.6% of the Teachers stated that the class boycott occurred only one day on 29 September 2014. Also, the Principals and Teachers estimated that the average percentages of students who participated in class boycott within the school premises were 14.4% and 13.1% respectively (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.1 Class Boycott in Schools (%)

	Principals	Teachers
Whether students asked for class boycott in the school?		
No	9.2	13.8
Yes	90.8	86.2
Students were allowed to take part in class boycott in school ONLY if they had parents' consent	73.9	66.9
Students were allowed to conduct/participate in class boycott in the school with no need to have parents' consent	20.2	28.7
Students were not allowed to conduct/participate in their class boycott in the school	1.7	1.2
No opinion	4.2	3.2
Whether students oppose class boycott in school?		
No	14.5	15.6
Yes	84.7	82.0
No opinion	0.8	2.4

Table 4.2 Class Boycott Occurred Within the School Premises (%)

	Principals	Teachers
Whether class boycott occurred within the school premises?		
No	10.7	14.9
Yes	89.3	85.1
The form of class boycott:		
Student who chose to participate in class boycott held discussion meetings within the school premises	61.5	57.6
Student who chose to participate in class boycott did self-study within the school premises	53.0	59.8
Student who chose to participate in class boycott applied for leave or were absent from the school	23.9	24.2
Others	6.8	3.7
The class boycott duration within the school premises		
Only on 29 September 2014	30.8	24.6
2–5 days	60.7	63.2
More than a week	0.9	6.7
No opinion	7.7	5.5
Percentage of students who participated in class boycott within the school premises		
Average percentage	14.4	13.1

Occupy Movement

- 4.5 About 59.5% of the Principals and 55.4% of the Teachers could provide the estimated figures of students participating in activities related to the Occupy Movement outside the school. Among them, the estimated average percentages of their students who “only went to the occupied site during the first few days of the movement” are 3.4% (Principals) and 5.6% (Teachers); “only participated in activities at the occupied site during weekends” are 2.7% (Principals) and 5.6% (Teachers); “visited the occupied site for a number of times” are 2.7% (Principals) and 5.3% (Teachers); “stayed overnight at the occupied site” are 0.8% (Principals) and 2.0% (Teachers); and “stayed overnight at the occupied site for an extended period of time” are 0.2% (Principals) and 0.6% (Teachers) (see Table 4.3).
- 4.6 About 40.5% of the Principals and 44.6% of the Teachers informed that they were unable to estimate the percentage of students participating in activities related to the Occupy Movement outside the school (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3 Average Percentages of Students Participating in Activities Related to the Occupy Movement Outside the School (%)

	Principals	Teachers
Could provide the estimated figures	59.5	55.4
Average percentages:		
Only went to the occupied site during the first few days of the movement	3.4	5.6
Only participated in activities at the occupied site during weekends	2.7	5.6
Visited the occupied site for a number of times	2.7	5.3
Stayed overnight at the occupied site	0.8	2.0
Stayed overnight at the occupied site for an extended period of time	0.2	0.6
Difficult to estimate because there is no way to obtain the figures	40.5	44.6

- 4.7 About 23.7% of the Principals and 83.6% of the Teachers could provide the estimated figures of the different attitudes of students towards participating in activities related to the Occupy Movement outside the school. Among them, the estimated average percentages of students who “supported the Occupy Movement, but didn’t participated actively” are 28.8% (Principals) and 39.5% (Teachers); “stayed sympathetic, but disagree with the actions taken by the Occupy Movement participants” are 12.2% (Principals) and 18.4% (Teachers); “actively supported the Occupy Movement, but disagree with secondary school students to participate in the movement” are 4.9% (Principals) and 12.2% (Teachers); “actively supported and participated in the Occupy Movement”, are

2.3% (Principals) and 8.8% (Teachers); and “in principle, oppose the Occupy Movement” are 3.8% (Principals) and 10.6% (Teachers) (see Table 4.4).

- 4.8 About 76.3% of the Principals and 16.4% of the Teachers stated that they were unable to estimate the figures, because “there was no way to obtain information” (Principals: 78.1%, Teachers: 78.8%); “students’ attitudes changes: from very supportive to indifferent” (Principals: 21.0%, Teachers: 17.3%) and “students’ attitudes changes: from ambivalent to very supportive” (Principals: 1.0%, Teachers: 4.0%) (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Attitudes of Students Towards the Occupy Movement (%)

	Principals	Teachers
Could provide the estimated figures	23.7	83.6
Average percentages:		
Actively supported and participated in the Occupy Movement	2.3	8.8
Actively supported the Occupy Movement, but disagree with secondary school students to participate in the movement	4.9	12.2
Supported the Occupy Movement, but didn't participated actively	28.8	39.5
Stayed sympathetic, but disagree with the actions taken by the Occupy Movement participants	12.2	18.4
In principle, oppose the Occupy Movement	3.8	10.6
Difficult to estimate the figures	76.3	16.4
Reasons:		
There was no way to obtain information	78.1	78.8
Students' attitudes changes: from very supportive to indifferent	21.0	17.3
Students' attitudes changes: from ambivalent to very supportive	1.0	4.0

5. Rationales and Overall Impacts

Principles on facing challenges

- 5.1 The Principals and Teachers behaved similarly in responding to the challenges from class boycott and the Occupy Movement. Most of the Principals and Teachers believed that “the school should remain neutral in politics” (Principals: 88.5%, Teachers: 74.1%) and “the school should turn the incident into an learning experience for multiple perspectives” (Principals: 81.7%, Teachers: 61.8%). Additionally, around half of the Principals (47.3%) and Teachers (51.8%) expressed that “the school should respect students’ freedom of choice, teachers/school should only facilitate” (see Table 5.1).
- 5.2 None of the principals and only few teachers expressed that the school should encourage students to participate in the Occupy Movement (Principals: 0.0%, Teachers: 0.5%). A very few of them considered that they should not support students’ participation in it (Principals: 15.3%, Teachers: 6.0%) (see Table 5.1).
- 5.3 Concerning the relationships between school and politics, although it is believed that the school should remain neutral in politics (Principals: 88.5%, Teachers: 74.1%), not many felt that the school should stay away from politics (Principals: 13.7 %, Teachers: 8.4%) (see Table 5.1).
- 5.4 Furthermore, the Principals and Teachers were asked to rate the extent of realization of the basic principles held by the school when facing the challenge of “Class Boycott” and “Occupy Movement” (from scale 1 = a very small extent, to 10 = a very large extent). Both the Principals and Teachers reported that the principles had been realized to a relatively large extent (Principals: 8.1, Teachers: 7.5) (see Table 5.1).

Principals’ priority concerns

- 5.5 Principals were further asked to rate their priority concerns in making decisions during the Occupy Movement (scaling from 1 = very little concerned to 10 = very much concerned). “Students’ safety” (9.8) ranked the top among the different concerns. The second and third were “students’ possible emotional stress and anxiety” (8.6) and “harmony and solidarity of the school” (8.2) respectively (see Table 5.2).

Teachers’ rationales

- 5.6 Teachers were asked to reflect on how they helped their students during the Occupy Movement. A majority of the teachers reported that “promoted mutual understanding and respect of difference in views” (69.5%) and “analysed the pros and cons of the Occupy Movement to the students in school” (61.5%) were generally adopted (see Table 5.3).

Table 5.1 Basic Principles Held by the School When Facing the Challenges from Class Boycott and the Occupy Movement (%)

	Principals	Teachers
The school should remain neutral in politics	88.5	74.1
The school should turn the incident into an learning experience for multiple perspectives	81.7	61.8
The school should respect students' freedom of choice, teachers/school should only facilitate	47.3	51.8
The school should advise students against participation in the Occupy Movement	24.4	9.7
The school should not support students' participation in the Occupy Movement	15.3	6.0
The school should stay away from politics	13.7	8.4
The school should encourage students to participate in the Occupy Movement	0.0	0.5
Others	8.4	3.0
The extent of realization of the above principles (average scores)	8.1	7.5

Table 5.2 Average Scores of the Priority of Concerns in Making Decisions During the Period of the Occupy Movement

	Principals
Students' safety	9.8
Students' possible emotional stress and anxiety	8.6
Harmony and solidarity of the school	8.2
Difference in views among various stakeholders — Among students	7.8
Students' learning experience amidst social crises	7.6
Students' academic progress	7.4
Difference in views among the various stakeholders — Among teachers	7.2
Difference in views among the various stakeholders — Between school and the school sponsoring body/management board	7.2
Difference in views among the various stakeholders — Between school administrators and teachers	7.1
Difference in views between the school and other external forces — Between the school and the alumna	6.8
Difference in views between the school and other external forces — Between the school and the media	6.6

Table 5.3 Ways of Helping Students by Teachers During the Occupy Movement (%)

	Teachers
Promoted mutual understanding and respect of difference in views	69.5
Analysed the pros and cons of the Occupy Movement to the students in school	61.5
Organized in-school discussion sessions on the Occupy Movement and political reforms	30.0
Mediated conflicts between students and their schoolmates	23.7
Offered students phone contact for urgent call for help beyond office hours	23.5
Advised students to leave the occupied site	22.2
Mediated conflicts between students and their parents	22.0
Encouraged students to participate in the movement only in the school	15.2
Tried to avoid discussing issues on the Occupy Movement and political reforms in order to avoid split	11.1
Hope to protect the students by tracking the students at the occupied site	5.5
Took students to the occupied site for on-site observation	2.3
Took students to the occupied site to participate in the movement	1.4
Others	1.6

- 5.7 Only a small number of teachers “took students to the occupied site for on-site observation” (2.3%) and “took students to the occupied site to participate in the movement” (1.4%) (see Table 5.3).
- 5.8 Over 90% of the Teachers agreed that “students’ personal safety should come first” (75.1% strongly agree while 21.8% agree, total: 96.9%) and “encouraging students to learn to think from multiple perspectives” (61.2% strongly agree and 34.8% agree, total: 96.0%) were important principles when interacting with students during the incident. (see Table 5.4).
- 5.9 There are 58.0% of the Teachers agreed and 1.7% of the Teachers strongly agreed that “students should make their own decisions with teachers being facilitators”. More than half of the Teachers disagreed that teachers should encourage students to participate in the Occupy Central Movement (34.7% disagree and 27.3% strongly disagree, total: 62.0%) (see Table 5.4).
- 5.10 Teachers were also asked to rate the extent of realization of the basic principles they held when interacting with their students during the Occupy Movement (from scale 1 = a very small extent to 10= a very large extent). The Teachers indicated a relatively large extent of realization, with a mean score of 7.5 (see Table 5.4).

5.11 The impacts of the Movement on students were examined from the perspective of the Teachers. Among all, “understanding of society” (63.4%) was considered the most positive impact. About half of the Teachers felt that the Occupy Movement had no impact on students’ academic study (49.0%). The relationship between teachers and students were generally perceived as having no change (51.5%). For personal behaviour and attitude of the students, Teachers’ views were quite diversified, with 24.8% reporting positive, 8.6% negative, 27.1% half-half and 26.1% no change (see Table 5.5).

Table 5.4 Principles for Interacting with Students by Teachers (%)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Hard to say	No opinion
Students’ personal safety should come first	75.1	21.8	0.1	0.0	0.1	2.8
Students should make their own decision, and teachers should only be facilitators.	16.9	58.0	9.2	1.7	5.9	8.2
Teachers should encourage students to participate in the Occupy Movement	0.4	2.6	34.7	27.3	10.4	24.7
Teachers should advise students not to participate in the Occupy Movement	1.2	6.6	37.8	16.8	12.6	25.0
Teachers should encourage students to learn to think from multiple perspectives	61.2	34.8	0.1	0.1	0.2	3.5
The mean score of the extent of realization of the basic principles: 7.5						

Table 5.5 Impacts Perceived by Teachers of the Occupy Movement on Students (%)

	No opinion	Positive	Negative	Half-half	No change
Academic study	11.3	5.3	12.8	21.5	49.0
Personal behaviour and attitude	13.3	24.8	8.6	27.1	26.1
Understanding of society	7.4	63.4	4.3	21.8	3.1
Relationship between teachers and students	12.1	17.6	2.6	16.2	51.5