

Dancing in Chains? Diverse Stakeholders' Agency to Critically Deal with National Education in Hong Kong in the Post-national Security Law Era

In post-national security law Hong Kong, national education has been an urgent and central task for secondary schools. Yet, how to deal with it remains highly complicated and controversial among school principals, middle leaders, and teachers. In the current tightened societal and political environment, there has been an increasing assumption, both locally and globally, that the abovementioned stakeholders would follow the government's stance for reasons including political and safety concerns. However, whether and to what extent this is the case remains unknown, and assuming that all will blindly promote national education risks oversimplifying diverse forms of resistance from them. Therefore, looking into whether and how these stakeholders critically and reflectively deal with national education in practice from the perspective of agency will provide invaluable insights that reveal the complexity and rationales of their approaches to national education in schools. This project is the first systematic academic project aiming to provide a comprehensive, detailed, and updated picture of diverse stakeholders' approaches to national education in secondary schools in post-national security law Hong Kong. Its primary objective is to conduct semi-structured interviews with 80 principals, middle leaders, and teachers across secondary schools in Hong Kong, and then use thematic analysis to explore how they exert agency to keep the limited space of critically and reflectively dealing with national education, what challenges do they face, and what are their solutions. Its values and originality lie on three levels. On the societal level, given that national education has become a hot potato that troubles many schools, this timely project offers an in-depth understanding of their concerns and coping strategies, so that their voices can serve as a reference for society to critically reflect on national education. On the policy level, it offers evidence-based suggestions to foster inclusive and reflective decision-making regarding how to better implement national education in schools. On the practical level, it helps related stakeholders in schools develop empathy and mutual understanding to understand each other's difficulties and work together to co-create an environment that allows an inclusive and reflective national education. The project will lead to articles, presentations, seminars, workshops, reports, a website, and a monograph. Given the crucial status of national education in Hong Kong and that it has attracted international attention, these outputs will benefit researchers, government officials, policymakers, curriculum designers, school leaders, educators, students, and parents, both within and beyond Hong Kong.