School Improvement in Taiwan: Problems and Possibilities

Empowering Teachers through Teachers' Associations

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I. Introduction

Research Questions

"Teacher empowerment" has become a popular term widely seen in many discussions on school restructuring or educational reform. Research on teachers' professional growth, school organization, school leadership, or educational innovation all view "teacher empowerment" as the essential element. Why do research in various fields of education all emphasize the importance of teacher empowerment? What does teacher empowerment mean? What are the feasible strategies that might lead to teacher empowerment? What should we be aware of when empowering teachers in Taiwan? Past research indicated that teacher empowerment should be a group effort. In 1985, Teachers' Associations become legally institutionalized in Taiwan. This is a major advancement for Taiwan's teachers. We are curious if Taiwan's Teachers' Associations can be transformed into an empowering one and contribute to teacher empowerment and educational betterment.

To be specific, this paper will address the following questions:

1. Why is teacher empowerment emphasized in recent educational innovation?
2. What does teacher empowerment mean?
3. What are the strategies that can be used to promote teacher empowerment?
4. How can schoolteachers and education benefit from the idea of teacher empowerment?
   (1) What are the possibilities for transforming Taiwan's Teachers' Associations into empowering communities?
   (2) What are the strategies that might be used to empower teachers through Teachers' Associations?
   (3) What are the constraints to be overcome before empowering teachers through Teachers' Associations in Taiwan?

In Taiwan, Teachers' Association is a fairly new institution voluntarily formed at the school, city and national level. Its primary missions include advocating teachers' right and benefits, promoting the professional status of teachers, and contributing to the betterment of education. The second part of this paper shall

explore the opportunities and threats faced by Teachers' Associations and the possibilities of turning Teachers' Associations into the driving force or seed of teacher empowerment in Taiwan.   We also argue that while the idea of teacher empowerment should be welcomed in Taiwan, its implementation is not without constraints.   More preparatory steps are required before exercising its positive, concrete impact.

Data and Method

This paper represents the first stage of a two-year research project focusing on the development and empowerment of teachers and teachers' groups, especially Teachers' Associations, in Taiwan.   So far we have analyzed and synthesized the meaning of teacher empowerment and the strategies for its actualization.   We also have assessed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced by Teachers' Associations.   Possibilities and constraints of empowering teachers through Teachers' Associations on will be discussed in this paper.   We have utilized literature review and focused-group interviews (with school administrators, representatives from Teachers' Associations, and scholars) to address research questions.

In the following 18 months, we shall develop a Chinese version of School Participation Empowerment Scale (CSPES) modified from Short and Rinehart's(Short & Rinehart, 1992; Short and Greer, 1997) School Participant Empowerment Scale(SPES).   This will help us identify the schools in which their teachers and Teachers' Associations have the strongest and weakest senses of empowerment.   We then will identify key elements that might have contributed to the empowerment of schoolteachers and Teachers' Associations by comparing schools with high and low sense of empowerment.   Finally, strategies for empowering teachers through Teachers' Associations will be developed and tested through action research in selected schools with low sense of teacher empowerment.

II. Why Do We Need to Empower Teachers?

Teacher involvement in school decision-making is deemed as an effective strategy for substantial school changes among recent studies on school restructuring (Rice & Schneider, 1994; Short & Greer, 1997).   A publication of Carnage Foundation in 1986 " A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century" also proposed that teachers should be given more opportunities to express their opinions and to participate in school decision-making.   Teacher involvement in decision-making is also an important agenda in school-based management movement.   The decision model advocated by this tradition features a bottom-up, shared style of power relations among school participants.   It is believed that participation from teachers in

school decision-making can contribute to school improvement. Some empirical studies rendered support to this claim (White, 1992). In organizational studies, total quality management movement from the business field also proposes that problems faced by organizations should be solved by the front-line personnel since they have the first-hand, thorough information about the real situation out there. Past strategies of problem solving and systems of decision-making devalue the role of front-line personnel the decisions being implemented often failed to meet the challenge. According to the total quality management model, teachers should be given more power to handle their immediate work (Reep & Grier, 1992).

As to teaching profession, past proposals to promote teachers' professional status, such as increasing the basic requirements for teachers or building the system of teacher ladder, do not necessarily lead to teacher professionalization. A more effective way is to promote teacher empowerment and involvement (Mertens & Yarger, 1988). Sprague's (1992) analysis on teacher's work also pointed out the importance of increasing teachers' sense of empowerment and involvement. According to his analysis, teachers are relatively disempowered. This has to do with the characteristics and environments of teachers' work. The feminization, intensification, deskilling, and privatization of teachers' work all make teachers a disempowered group. Research on gender segregation in labor market (Reskin & Padavic, 1994) has explained why female-dominated occupations tend to have lower status in the society. Development in technology, increasing controls in curriculum and instruction, the development of teacher-proof curriculum, and the standardization of teachers' work make teachers maintain little control over their work. As a result, the professional abilities and status of teachers declined. The increasing workload of teachers and their isolated working environment also make it hard for teachers to engage in professional discussions and develop strong professional communities. Teachers' sense of disempowerment has a negative impact on their profession. Consequently, empowering teachers thus becomes an important agenda in teachers' professional development.

New development in leadership also coincides with the idea of teacher empowerment. In the past, successful leadership was defined as the ability to influence others' thinking and actions in order to accomplish the goals of organizations. The problem with this approach is that it assumed the goals of organizations can be predetermined, the strategies to accomplish the goals of organizations can be predetermined, and members of the organization can be influenced and controlled to pursue the goals of the organizations. The second wave of leadership studies emphasized the manipulation of organizational culture in order to increase organizational effectiveness. The problem with this approach is that

leaders have no idea if the goal he advocates is the best one for the organization. Critical theory argues that leaders should make members of its organization having the ability to evaluate the important goals of organizations. The role of the leaders is to facilitate the development of teachers so that they will have the power and ability to determine important things about their work and schools.

As indicated above, recent development on school reform, organizational studies, teachers' professional development, school leadership all point to the importance of teacher empowerment. They advocate the importance of increasing teachers' power and ability in order to improve teachers' professional status and ability (Zeichner, 1991). To understand better how we can utilize the concept of teacher empowerment, I will analyze and synthesize its meanings seen in the literature in the following section.

III. The Meaning of Teacher Empowerment

According to Foy (1994, 5), empowerment is to make people have the power so that their opinions can be valued in order to influence decisions or plans that would affect them. An empowered person knows how to use his experiences to improve his performance, and consequently, the performance of organizations. Foy (1994,4) gives an example to illustrate the difference between empowerment and delegation. If parents give their adolescent money to buy jeans, it is delegation. If parents give their adolescent money and let them decide which clothes they want to buy, it is empowerment. The adolescent could get some clothes that are not appropriate for him. They might spend all of their money on summer clothes and end up with no money left to purchase clothes for the winter. However, after making several inappropriate decisions, they know how to allocate their expense to get appropriate clothes for four seasons. Empowerment is not easy and it can not be accomplished shortly. However, it can invoke real thinking and learning as well as meaningful action.

How does an empowered educator look like? According to Irwin (1996,13), an empowered educator is one who believes in himself and his ability of action. He understands the system of domination and dedicates to the improvement of oppressive practice in the society. He respects others and uses his power to protect the uniqueness of individuals. Whether working alone or with each other people, they are firm, practical, and passionate. He dedicates to the self-realization of people in the classroom, at school, and in the community.

Wilson and Coolican(1996) point out that the concept of teacher empowerment has two categories. One is extrinsic power and the other is intrinsic power. The exercise of extrinsic power is an approach to improve the professional status of teachers. Teachers have the recognized status. They can gain the information and

knowledge they need to perform their job and participate in decision-making. Site-based management is an example of the realization of teachers' extrinsic power. Intrinsic power refers to teachers' personal attitudes rather than the ability to control others.　A teachers with intrinsic power is confident when demonstrating their skills and influencing their work.　The realization of such power can be judged by teachers' self-determination, their ability to make decisions on their work, and their sense of efficiency.　A self-empowered person can see their internal power.　They can demonstrate their internal power when interacting with others.　A self-empowered person is self-motivated.　They believe that the best source of authority comes from within.　They are also confident that their thought and feelings are valuable.

　　According to Wilson and Coolican's analysis, it is not enough to have teachers possessing extrinsic power.　Teachers might participate in school decision-making, but that does not mean that such participation is self-motivated and based on their professional responsibility and judgment.　We need to have teachers develop their intrinsic power so that they will act on their professional responsibility and judgment. Both extrinsic and intrinsic power are important elements of teacher empowerment.

　　Prawatt(1991) reviewed articles on teacher empowerment and developed a conceptual framework for understanding teacher empowerment.　He found that the meaning of teacher empowerment varies according to the context it appears (individual level and external level) and the purpose of empowerment (political or epistemological).　Conversation with self belongs to the individual level.　The epistemological purpose at this level is to have one critically reflect on his(or her) own knowledge and values.　The political purpose of empowerment at the individual level is to make one having the ability to handle the unequal relations in the society and the confidence in voicing his(or her) opinions.　Conversation with the environment belongs to the external level.　At this level, the epistemological purpose of empowerment is to make a teacher capable of adopting multiple perspectives to analyze a problem and understanding an issue from various dimensions.　The political purpose of teacher empowerment is to have teachers gaining control over their work and maintaining their own autonomy. Teachers will actively collect information, resources, and help they need to perform their jobs. Prawat's analysis of teacher empowerment provides clear explanations of teacher empowerment.

　　I synthesize the meaning of teacher empowerment discussed above with three dimensions:

A. **Psychological dimension**: Individuals are confident about themselves. They believe in their ability and their personal value.　They are confident that they can use their own skills to accomplish their tasks (Irwin, 1986; Kreisberg, 1992).

B. **Action dimension**: Concrete actions are required for the accomplishment of teachers' jobs.　For example, individuals will know how to collect the information they need to accomplish their work.　They know how to get the resources they need to accomplish their jobs as well as the betterment of the organizations.

C. **Political dimension**:　Empowerment will inevitably change the power relations in the organization.　It involves the reallocation and redistribution of valuable resources. As a result, political dimension is an important part of teacher empowerment.　It is necessary to develop individual's participatory competence so that they can play valuable roles in the society (Kreisberg, 1992).　Individuals must possess knowledge and critical sense, know how things work, understand the sources of their disempowerment, and actively work on changing their own situation and promote social justice.

How do we know a community is an empowering one?　Scholars suggested that there are several clues that may indicate the actualization of empowerment.

A. **At the individual level**: One has the opportunities to exercise their abilities. They can control their own work and are capable of learning new things and increase their knowledge and skills.

B. **At the environmental level**: The environment where one work will provide one with opportunities of learning.　Individuals enjoy the sense of autonomy and the right of choice.　Individuals are also involved in decision-making.

C. **At the outcome level**: The result of empowerment is the establishment of the senses of responsibility and community as well as collaborative relationship in the society.　It is a realization of strong will of action.　One will be able to exercise concrete influences on their work and environment.　It will also contribute to status promotion.

IV. Can We Empower Teachers through Teachers' Associations?
Teachers' Associations in Taiwan

The pass of Teacher Law in 1995 gave legitimacy to the establishment of Teachers' Associations at the school, city and national level.　Since then, many schools have formed their own Teachers' Associations. The establishment of Teachers' Associations signals the democratization and professionalization of education in Taiwan. However, critics also raised concerns about potential crises in the operation of Teachers' Associations as well as the possibilities of achieving its pre-set goals. For example, many schools have yet formed their own Teachers' Associations. Some schools observed great tension, sometimes conflicts, between Teachers' Associations and their administrative units.　Others reported losing memberships due to lack of support from teachers. The legitimacy and representativeness of Teachers'

Associations were put in doubt, so were their functions in promoting teachers' professional development, teachers' benefits, and educational betterment.

Potentials for Transforming Teachers' Associations into Empowering Communities

If we agree that Teachers' Associations are important for teachers' professional development and benefit, what can we do to make Teachers Organization capable of achieving their goals?   This paper argues that "teacher empowerment" should be an important strategy for realizing the functions of Teachers' Associations.   We made this claim based on the following reasons.

A. **Ideas about school management**:   The formation of Teachers Organizations changes the power structure in schools.   Instead of having principals make most of decisions about teachers and schools, Teacher Law clearly specifies the realms that teachers can participate in making decisions about schools and education. For example, one representative from each Teachers' Association may join Teachers' Evaluation Council and participate in the evaluation and recruitment of schoolteachers. Representatives from Teachers' Associations may also join City Board of Education and City Council of Teachers' Petitions (item no.10 in Basic Education Law and no. 11, no. 29 in Teacher Law).   All of these indicate that teachers now have power in influencing issues related to teachers' profession and benefits.   This is different from the top-down style of school management commonly seen in the past and corresponds more to the concept of "shared decision making" in recent educational reform. Despite the fact that teachers do not need to join Teachers' Associations to express their opinions, joining Teachers' Associations is definitely a more effective and powerful way of getting teachers voice heard and opinions valued.

B. **Teachers' professional development and educational betterment**: While "teacher empowerment" emphasizes extending teachers' power in school decision making, its ultimate goal should not be the expansion of teachers power, but rather the promotion of teachers' professional status and the improvement of education. According to Teacher Law (no. 27), some of the functions of Teachers' Associations are directly related to the ultimate goal of teacher empowerment. For example, some of the functions of Teachers' Associations include protecting teachers' dignity, professional status, and autonomy.   Teachers' Associations are also expected to solve problems in education and negotiate rules to regulate teaching profession.   All of these functions contribute to the professional status of teachers and the improvement of education.   The goal of Teachers' Association coincides with those of teacher empowerment.   Teachers' Associations can play an important role in building collegial and professional

atmosphere in school.

C. **Power from within**: Teacher empowerment emphasizes the active will and concrete actions of teachers in improving education. In the other words, teachers are not asked or ordered to do their responsibilities. An empowered teacher will take the initiative to improve education without orders or commands from the top or rewards from outside. In Taiwan, Teachers' Associations are formed on a voluntary base. As a result, those who choose to join Teachers' Associations are expected to identify more with the goals of Teachers' Associations and play a more active role in improving education. This corresponds to the idea of "power from within" we discuss in the essence of teacher empowerment. However, past experiences revealed that teachers join Teachers' Associations for various reasons. Sometimes Teachers' Associations become the realm of power struggle among schoolteachers or the escape land of irresponsible teachers. These incidents significantly reduce the support towards Teachers' Associations among schoolteachers. Faced with the crisis of declining support from schoolteachers, it is imperative for Teachers' Associations to engage in meaningful changes. Teacher law clearly indicates that all of the teachers (both members and nonmembers of Teachers' Associations) should follow any agreement or consensus between Teachers' Associations and other public and private agencies. Judging from this perspective, it is undesirable for teachers to exclude themselves from Teachers' Associations. Teachers' Associations should improve its operation so that it can become a magnet that brings in active participation from schoolteachers. Obstacles that prevent schoolteachers to participate in Teachers' Associations, such as heavy teaching loads, idleness of schoolteachers, and threats from the top, should also be removed to encourage the participation of schoolteachers.

D. **Sense of Community**: According to Romish(1991), school democratization can be accomplished by single teachers. It takes group actions from teachers. Irwin(1996) also emphasizes the importance of empowering communities in which mutual support among community members leads to teacher empowerment. Senge distinguished individual effort and group effort when he talked about transforming school organizations into learning organizations. According to Senge(O'neil, 1995), a perfect orchestra is more than the addition of perfect players. It takes good players, and most importantly, coordination among good players, to make a great orchestra. The same can be applied to Teachers' Associations. The coordination and cooperation among schoolteachers and the sense of community are crucial for teachers' professional development. Teachers' Associations can become such community that encourages coordination

and cooperation among schoolteachers.

The four reasons just discussed indicate the potentials and possibilities for transforming Teachers' Associations into empowering ones. Teacher empowerment has become the core of educational reform.   According to Blasé and Blasé(1994, 4-5), scholars from the critical emancipatory perspective(such as Apple, Freire, Giroux), liberal perspective(such as Glickman and Lightfoot), or conservative perspective(such as Liberman and Maeoroff) all emphasize the importance of teacher empowerment.   Liberal scholars focus on the situation in the classroom.   They wanted to know how empowered teachers can improve classroom practices. Conservative scholars view empowered teachers as an important approach for improving the professional status of teachers.   Schools won't be improved because of the orders or rules from the top.   It will be improved only if teachers want to improve them. The formation of Teachers' Associations signals an important step towards transforming schoolteachers into an empowering community.   Such community should be a conscious, caring, risk-taking, and learning community (Irwin, 1996, O'Neil, 1995).   The next couple of years will be the critical years for Teachers' Associations in Taiwan. We argue that transforming Teachers' Associations into an empowered one should help maintain the continuous operation of Teachers' Associations.

V.   Strategies for Empowering Teachers through Teachers' Associations

The following strategies are suggested by the literature.   They reveal how Teachers' Associations might be transformed into an empowering one.

A. **Encourage risk-taking**: Teachers' Associations need to assure teachers that failure is acceptable so that teachers will be willing to express their own opinions or views (Reep & Grier, 1992).   Failure to create such a safe environment will make teachers reluctant to make changes or testing new ideas.   Eventually, teachers become the obstacles in educational reform.

B.   **Use resistance when necessary**: Sprague (1992) thinks resistance is an important approach for teacher empowerment.   An important concept of empowerment is to have those who were quite willing to express their own opinions, rather than acting passively.   Sprague suggested that institutional resistance could be the starting point.   Through institutional resistance, we could test the limit of bureaucracy.   Some people show great concerns for teacher's resistance.   As a matter of fact, teacher resistance is sometimes inevitable.   We should judge teachers' resistance based on its goals and motivation and assess if it will contribute to educational betterment and teachers' professional development.

Through teachers' resistance, teachers can have their voiced heard and the injustice things in education removed.　Teachers' Associations need to develop programs that would cultivate teachers' abilities of critical thinking and oral expression.　Without these abilities, teachers can not participate in decision-making effectively, express their opinions openly, and invoke changes significantly (Romanish, 1991).

C. **Develop collegialty and collaboration among teachers**:　An important strategy to empower teachers is to develop collegialty and collaboration among schoolteachers.　That means teachers need to share their experiences with each other and solve educational problems together (Sprague, 1992; Reep & Grier, 1992).　Peer-coaching should be encouraged (Anderson, 1994).　An empowered school is also a collaborative school in which collaborative curriculum planning and evaluation is common.　Increasing the interaction and linkage among schoolteachers is critical for empowering teachers (Hallinger & Richardson, 1988; Irwin, 1996).

D. **Pursue shared leadership**:　Teachers' Associations should increase their control over their work and immediate environment.　Providing chances for teachers to participate in school decision-making and making information shared by schoolteachers (rather than few administrators) are important strategies for increasing shared leadership.　There is little doubt that tension might exist among school participants while pursuing shared leadership at school.　Decentralization means that some people's power will be taken away.　Whether principals and the administrative units are willing to give away their power and stimulate the growth of abilities among schoolteachers will be critical for shared leadership (Reep & Grier, 1992).

E. **Develop programs to prepare leaders**: Teachers' Associations need leaders (of all kinds, such as curriculum, instruction, teachers' professional development, teachers' benefit, etc.) to plan for the organizations.　Establishing programs to prepare future education leaders are important for developing empowered teacher community and the continuous operation of Teachers' Associations.

F. **Establish transformative vision and restructure teaching profession**: Teachers need to see their profession differently (Sprague, 1992).　Teachers' job is more than teaching based on some models.　Teaching needs to take into account students' individual difference and invoke quantitative and qualitative changes among their students.　Teachers also need to aware of the political dimension of their work.　Teaching is a complicate work.　What we pursue is not a standardized practice, but the appropriate practice.　Teachers need to have full control over their work, pursue professional development, and change their views

about teaching profession.

VI. Constraints for Empowering Teachers through Teachers' Associations in Taiwan

Despite the fact that we argue empowerment is critical for the continuous operation of Teachers' Associations in Taiwan, we are also aware of the constraints that might turn this great opportunity into a slogan of reform.

A. **Time and Energy**: To have teachers involved in school decision-making means that they will have less time spent on their students.　This will inevitably lead to resentment and criticism from outside.　Teachers might not be willing to take more responsibility due to great pressure in balancing two demands (White, 1992; Zeichner, 1991). If we really want our teachers to participate more in school decision-making, necessary strategies are required to reduce teachers' workload (for example, less teaching hours, better labor division and coordination).

B. **Lack of Financial Support**:　Teachers' Association is formed on a voluntary base.　They receive no fund from the state or other public agencies.　Without financial input, Teachers' Associations lack the financial support it needs for teacher training.　Some teachers devote their personal time and energy to improve the working conditions of all teachers while others can enjoy the result of their effort with no input.　This will have a negative impact on teacher empowerment.

C. **Lack of Training**: Teachers' Associations need to develop programs to prepare teachers for participating in school affairs, especially in the fields that they are not familiar with.　Teacher empowerment is more than the expansion of teachers' power.　It also emphasizes the growth of teachers' ability.　Expanding teachers' power without corresponding growth in their ability will reduce the legitimacy and support toward Teachers' Associations.　Teachers need to be prepared for participating in school decision-making.

D. **Legacy of Traditional Bureaucracy**:　Teacher empowerment inevitably changes the power relations at school, but administrators and teachers might not be ready for that.　Teachers in Taiwan are used to taking orders from the top.　Having them take the responsibilities of making decisions might become a burden or even a challenge for them (Foster, 1990).　Some administrators are used to taking orders. Having them share their power with teachers might invoke oppositions from administrators.　Legacy from traditional bureaucracy will hinder the realization of teacher empowerment.

E. **Relations between Schools and Communities**: The increase in teachers' professional authority and power in decision making means less participation from

the community.　As a result, the voices of community members, especially those of parents, might receive little attention.　Their support of educational reform might be reduced, too.

VII.　Suggestions for Empowering Teachers through Teachers' Associations

　We offer the following suggestions for anyone who might be interested in empowering teachers through Teachers' Associations.　It is important to keep these following guidelines in mind.

A. **Specify the domains for teacher participation in school decision-making**: Teachers should not try to participate in all aspects of school management at a time.　This is especially true given the fact that teachers have limited time and energies.　Some people raised serious doubt on the linkage between teachers' participation in school decision-making and the improvement in students' performance. Others argue that teachers' participation in school decision making has a negative impact on students learning.　Scholars argue that it is better for teachers to participate in the fields that are directly related to their professional practices (such as teaching and curriculum) or benefits (salaries and promotion). Administrators and teachers also need to come to a mutual agreement on both sides' jobs and responsibilities.　Using this as the basis, teachers and administrators can develop successful models of teacher participation in school decision-making and increase the legitimacy and authority of teachers' participation in school management (Conway & Calzi, 1995; Karant, 1989).

B. **Be clear about the goal of teacher empowerment**:　The expansion of teachers' power and ability are not the final goals of teacher empowerment.　The ultimate goal of teacher empowerment is to enhance educational betterment and students' benefit.　Accomplishing the former goals without advancing students' benefit and educational betterment is not considered as real teacher empowerment (Conway & Calzi, 1995; Romanish, 1995).

C. **Specify the rules for teacher participation**:　Organization needs to have clear, well-specified rules for participation so that power won't be the privilege of few members in the organization.　The same principles can be applied to Teachers' Associations.　How are the representatives chosen?　What are their responsibilities?　How can teachers participate in Teachers' Associations equally and productively?　These rules are critical for the continuous operation of Teachers' Associations in Taiwan.

D. **Provide enough time and patience for teacher participation**:　Teacher

empowerment is a process, rather than an event.   It takes time for schoolteachers to gain the power and ability they need for school participation (Conway & Calzi, 1995).   The result of school participation might not be always successful because some experiments or new trials might not work out.   The progress of teacher empowerment is affected by the quality of teachers, the background and personality of principles, the number of programs currently implemented at school, as well as the educational expectations of the school district (Kirby, Wilmperberg, & Keaster, 1992).   When empowering teachers at school, we need to consider the background and concerns of individual teachers.   Negotiation and compromise are important are necessary for the realization of teacher empowerment (Rosen, 1993).   Schools need to be prepared for the possible delays or lack of efficiency due to teacher participation in school management (Mentell, 1993).   Through well preparation, we can reduce the negative impact caused by teacher participation and secure public support for teacher empowerment.

E. **Bring in participation from other groups**:   Teachers' Associations should not exclude the participation from other groups since it will cut the channel of mutual communication and understanding between teachers and other groups.   The partners of Teachers' Associations are more than teachers themselves.   Principals, parents, and other teachers' groups should be welcome.   Exclusion, isolation, or closure will not win any sincere support for Teachers' Associations.   Inclusion and interaction will.

VIII. Conclusion

We have reviewed why the idea of teacher empowerment was highly valued in many fields of education.   We also discussed the meaning of teacher empowerment seen in the literature. Our primary concern in this paper is Taiwan's newly formed Teachers' Associations.   The birth of Teachers' Associations is a major accomplishment in Taiwan's education.   However, the status of Teachers' Associations is controversial in some dimensions.   Its future operation is not without problems, either.   We see great potentials in transforming Teachers' Associations into empowering communities that would contribute to teachers' professional development and educational betterment.   Therefore, we synthesize strategies for empowering teachers through Teachers' Associations.   We also discuss the constraints that are foreseen based on literature review and focused-group interviews.   Several cautions were made about empowering teachers in Taiwan.   Findings from this paper will be field-tested in the following 18 months to investigate how we can empower our teachers through Teachers' Associations.

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