



Civic Learning in Hong Kong: Starting from Schools¹

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As classroom and schools are the “miniature political communities” that help incubate students’ civic experiences, they can influence their civic development and civic participation cognitively and behaviorally. Meanwhile, principals and teachers can act as school-site change agents for the development of civically responsive and responsible youngsters at the formative age. However, past studies have not extensively examined how participative classrooms lead to better civic learning and active civic lives in schools. Neither has any responded to the current political circumstances in Hong Kong by relating controversial issues such as students’ democratic values and civic attitudes to future civic engagement including illegal protest.

To fill this research gap and provide policy directions, we propose and test a model of how political socialization at school affects development of early adolescents’ democratic values, attitudes to civic institutions and the nation, and aspirations for conventional and unconventional civic action. As young people in Hong Kong are increasingly active and radical in recent years (e.g., Scholarism, Occupy Central Movement), we examine their possible roots. Specifically we test multilevel structural equation models on a sample of 2902 Hong Kong secondary Form 2 students from the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA)’s 2009 International Civics and Citizenship Education study (ICCS). These young adults were at the age when the survey was conducted. Their aspirations expressed then might have translated into actions now.

The results can inform policies to help schools fulfill their civic mission and nurture “politically literate, participatory, and critically thinking” future citizens.

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