



**“Leading for Civic Learning”:  
A New Priority for School Leadership in Uncertain Times**

**Kerry KENNEDY & LI Lijuan, Joanna**

Civic education is a component of the school curriculum in most countries yet it is not always given a high priority compared to subjects such as Mathematics, Science and Language. Given the current climate of concern related to youth radicalisation, the apparent attractiveness of radical solutions to social problems and the importance of adolescence as a key time for political socialisation, new efforts should be made to make civic education a more central and more relevant part of the school experience. In particular, the role school leadership can play in developing more civically-oriented schools should be examined.

Kennedy, Li & Chan (2014) and Li & Kennedy (2015) reported studies of the individual school and community influences on Hong Kong students’ civic knowledge and understanding. The results suggested that schools could be differentiated by the extent to which students were encouraged to participate in school civic activities. Schools with high levels of student participation tended to have students with higher levels of civic knowledge. At the same time, resources in the community were also a significant influence on students’ civic learning. This result highlighted the importance of leadership in creating a culture of participation and suggested that ‘leading for civic learning’ should be a priority in responding to the current need for more relevant and meaningful civic education in schools.

The purpose of this paper is to explore in greater depth what it means to adopt ‘leading for civic learning’ as a motif for student civic development. Implications will be drawn for classroom pedagogy, the school curriculum and school policies in order to show how schools might respond to the current climate of youth disaffection and alienation.