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The Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL) project represents a partnership effort across several post-secondary institutions and a range of community-based groups in Toronto (Canada). This project was funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, under its Community University Research Alliance program (2009-2014). Drawing on carefully designed survey and case study methods as well as a participatory action research orientation - the aim of this research project has been to offer the most intensive study of activist learning and development in anti-poverty work in Canada.

The co-editors are pleased to present its official working paper series. The publications contained in this series are linked to APCOL project work and themes. They are authored and co-authored by academic as well as community-based researchers. The material is the copy-right of individual authors or co-authors. Rights for use in the APCOL Working Paper Series is granted to the APCOL project for these purposes only.


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The role of anti-poverty organizing for citizenship: Living and learning citizenship and agency through community activism



THE ROLE OF ANTI-POVERTY
ORGANIZING FOR CIZENSHIP:
LIVING AND LEARNING
CIZENSHIP AND AGENCY
THROUGH COMMUNITY ACTIVISM

INTRODUCENCY

movement participation research in Toronto, Canada. Using findings of activist survey data from an anti-poverty community organizing context, I conclude that there is a link between active citizenship and activism in the community, and furthermore that these are not the same thing and one cannot stand in for the other. Rather, research on community participation fills important holes but does not constitute the broader theory of active citizenship.

The findings of this paper are relevant to the field of adult and particularly community education as it discusses spaces and processes that have the potential to create more informed, critical and engaged citizens.

MODELS OF CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship theory holds potential for examining, explaining and addressing political, civic and social problems. Citizen participation is regarded as the "essence of democracy" (Wandersman, Florin, Friedmann & Meier, 1987, p.534), and critical to understanding forms of political activity and organization. If citizenship is seen as a way to move toward democratic participation and social change, we must first have an idea of what is meant by citizenship and what is the type of citizen a particular society wants or needs. Furthermore, in order to support this, it is necessary to understand howTf [(Furt) 1 (herm) -1

responsible citizens, who follow rules, act responsibly in their community, and embody characteristics of honesty, integrity, self-discipline and hard work (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

The criticism of the notion of citizenship as personal status and virtues is that it is narrow and non-inclusive. It regards citizens solely as adults who were born in this country. This works to exclude many - such as immigrants and youth - from the discussion of citizenship by virtue of not being considered citizens by the state. When citizenship education programs address these groups, they tend to treat them as *in deficit* and focus on teaching how to become and behave like good citizens. Framing citizenship and citizenship education in such ways may not be constructive in addressing problems and working toward social action and change. It has been argued that the emphasis on individualism "distracts attention from analysis of the causes of social problems and from systemic solutions... volunteerism and kindness are put forward as ways of avoiding politics and policy" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p.658). If contributions to a country, a province, a region or a community, however, are to be seen as central to what genuine citizenship is, then the issue of the means and opportunity to effectively respond to challenges emerges as an important consideration. This in turn requires attention to the meaning of agentive or 'active' citizenship.

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

A broader conception of citizenship comprises not just rights and obligations but rather (or in addition) considers citizenship in terms of community and identity. Merrifield (1997) defines citizenship as effective, skilled and knowledgeable public-spirited work to solve common problems in one's community or society. This view frames citizenship as

think, deliberate and negotiate their political and social conditions. Citizenship is a practice that comes out of this lived experience.

Active citizenship speaks to individuals' active development, expansion and use of their civic, political and social rights. The 'active citizen' is involved in participatory processes and engages in community and public affairs at various levels (i.e. local, regional, national, transnational), and these experiential elements can be seen as both signifiers of and catalysts for active citizenship (Haahr, 1997). As with Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) *participatory citizen*, the emphasis is on being an active member of the community, knowing how government and other institutions work and having the capacity to affect change.

Viewing citizenship in relation to the capacity to affect change is important with regard to how citizenship is maintained and extended in society. A critique of notions of citizenship without an agentive lens is that they are, in essence, socially reproductive. Social structures and systems determine who is and who is not a citizen, which produces patterns of social action and interaction that in turn recreates the same social structures and relationships over time. This social reproduction of citizenship is challenged vis-à-vis the notion of citizenship as active and inherently change-oriented. Active citizenship is not limited to "making a contribution" (which too can be simply reproductive) but has a transformative nature within the capacity and pre-disposition toward change. As individuals act, their participation supports the creation of knowledge, responsibility, common identity, sense of agency, and "hereby a democratic culture" (Haahr, 1997, p.7).

This framing recognizes citizenship as having multiple dimensions, related to status, identity, civic values and agency (Schugurensky, 2006). A multi-dimensional notion connotes the different elements and conditions that contribute to active citizenship. It relates how issues of membership; feelings of belonging; dispositions, values and behaviours; and engagement and political efficacy affect our enactive skills for citizenship in civic society and the political realm.

Within a multi-dimensional model, the focus on *agency* is of particular importance for active citizenship. Our perception of and confidence in our ability to act in effective ways and achieve collective action is a central tenet in the practice of citizenship with social purpose goals. Thus research and practice working toward goals of social change must

While seemingly simple, this continuum of community activity speaks to a very specific type of link between participation in the community and active citizenship. As citizens are involved with others around civic, social and political issues they are learning about and experiencing an example of active citizenship. Understanding this link, both in terms of how it works and the potential for development, can be made clearer through consideration of social movement participation literature. Explanations of activism in the community can shed light onto theories and practices of active citizenship.

LINKING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP AND ACTIVISM

ACTIVISM/COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Community participation is a key dimension of active citizenship. It is a channel by which people learn about citizenship, as well as an indicator that one is an active citizen in society. Community participation has been broadly studied in its various forms, ranging from individual participation for personal instrumental purposes, to joint action in

mobilization theories, which claim that available resources such as human time, effort and money enhance the likelihood of collective action (e.g. Cress & Snow, 1996; Zald, 1992). Some or all of these theories may explain why and how specific factors, such as demographic variables of gender, age, marital status, educational attainment and occupational status, are found to affect activism.

In addition to demographic factors, other types of characteristics may be related to participation. There is overwhelming evidence that factors such as community knowledge and prior experiences of activism contribute to social movement participation (Morris & Staggenborg, 2007). In an empirical investigation of personality and attitudinal variables, Wandersman et al. (1987) found that neighbourhood participation was

Diani, 2006). Having a common sense of identity - a 'collective we' - can be both a predictor and a product of participation.

As identities are built and reproduced through activism, it can lead to a sense of belonging and social

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neighbourhood in relation to years in Canada. Through discussion of the findings, we see possible explanations around why some people orient to staying in the neighbourhood and others are orienting to leaving or present no plans one way or the other.

The paper then presents an analysis of social power among immigrant activists, looking at how years in Canada affect perceptions that community members have the ability to solve neighbourhood problems. Importantly, the analysis of social power further refines and discusses the potential of individual and collective agency to predict and reinforce action.

Finally, the conclusion ties the analyses together and links these findings to the theory of active citizenship. Not only can we see that immigrants are learning through involvement in activism in their neighbourhood, but the paper summarizes key areas of learning and how the process of learning supports the development of active citizens. I conclude with a brief discussion of practical applications of citizenship learning to adult and community education.

SURVEY SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

A sample of 110 survey participants was analyzed, consisting of 60 residents of the Kingston Galloway-Orton Park and 50 residents of Weston-Mount Dennis. Kingston-Galloway Orton Park and Weston-Mount Dennis are neighbourhoods located in the north-eastern and north-western parts of Greater Toronto, respectively, and are part of the growing concentration of poverty within inner suburban areas (Hulchanski, 2010). The city is becoming increasingly polarized into wealthy neighbourhoods and greater numbers of disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and middle-income neighbourhoods are disappearing. Both Kingston Galloway-Orton Park and Weston-Mount Dennis are considered 'priority areas' by the City of Toronto, as neighbourhoods marked by growing levels of poverty, high need and inadequate community infrastructure (United Way of

before-tax low-income rate of 24.5% of all persons in Toronto in 2006 (City of Toronto, 2008).

Table 1 provides a list of reported income status for the survey sample:

Reported

ACTIVIST SURVEY FINDINGS

In presenting findings, the paper will refer to groups of individuals as cohorts, created by their answers to certain questions on the survey, i.e. clusters constituted by years of arrival or age. Communities will be used to refer to groups, either established or newly formed, based on ethnicity, race or linguistic differences. Neighbourhoods will be used to refer to groups bound by geography.

YEARS IN CANADA AND ACTIVISM

While overall years in Canada seem to have an effect on activism, this relationship varies depending on the length of residency.

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The findings from years in Canada and involvement in community activity suggest that length of time in Canada increases the likelihood of activism, *but only up to a certain point*. The general increase in participation can be hypothesized to be related to
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The analysis of Jamaican and Indian communities in this sample found some differences between the two ethnic groups. As shown in table 3 above, Jamaicans were slightly more likely to be involved in activism than Indians. This link between activism and a well-established community provides additional support for the finding that people who have been in Canada for longer periods of time are more likely to be involved in activism.

Further examination of differences between the two ethnic communities with respect to demographic variables is also shown in table 3. This is relevant in considering factors that may mediate an effect of years in Canada on activism. Data shows that Jamaicans were more likely than Indians to: have completed post-secondary education; be employed, particularly in full-time or self-employment; and identify as a member of a visible minority. The education and employment differences may be a product of length of time in the country, and furthermore, are in line with findings from the participation literature, where educational level and occupational status predict community activism.

The finding that the majority of the Jamaican community identifies as a member of a visible minority, whereas the Indian community does notⁱⁱⁱ, is relevant to the discussion of identity and its relation to activism. A connection between identification as a member of a visible minority group and likelihood to be involved in community activism could work through processes of ethnic/racial community identification, a sense of community belonging, increased social network ties, and awareness of issues and solidarity with causes. If these factors predict and explain activism, as is shown in social movement participation literature, then it is not surprising that well-established communities have higher levels of activism. Analyses around recent and established ethnic/racial communities and their tendencies toward or away from participation have potential to contribute greater understanding on the mechanisms that facilitate activism.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT SOCIAL OR POLITICAL ISSUES

Among activists, knowledge about social or political issues may be an important factor in how people become (and remain) involved, and the direction of their involvement. In

other words, knowledge about social or political issues may tell us something useful about active citizenship, where involvement is related to civic, social and political rights and how one orients to issues in local contexts.

among the cohort who has been in Canada for 6-10 years. For this cohort, ac

current data does not provide answers these questions, it shows differential patterns of engagement and raises concerns around neighbourhood plans in relation to community building and/or mobility.

SOCIAL POWER

Social power refers to a type of power that comes from people and groups organizing. This is a very effective source of power, which can take the form of citizens intervening in communities and result in and explain social change. In this survey, social power was examined as the power to identify ways to solve problems in the neighbourhood. The survey measured whether people agree, neither agree nor disagree, or disagree with statements about community members having social power.

An analysis was conducted using data from immigrant activists^{iv}. Findings show that a mean of 68.6% of people agreed that community members have a lot of power in the community organization/campaign in terms of identifying ways to solve problems in the neighbourhood. 31.4% of people disagreed with the statement, and no one reported 'neither agree nor disagree'.

To deepen the analysis of social power in relation to immigrant activists, data examining response to the social power statement and years in Canada was analyzed. In figure 5 below, we can see that the proportion of activists agreeing that community members have social power is higher than those who disagree across all cohorts:

Years in Canada Agree

An analysis of these responses shows that length of time in Canada seems to be playing a role in feelings of social power. Activists who have been in Canada for over 20 years are most likely to agree that community members have social power, whereas those in Canada for 6-10 years are most likely to disagree. The social power associated with cohorts who have lived in Canada for longer periods of time speaks to the learning in activism that occurs over time. While this relationship is not simply positive and linear, the overall high proportion of activists who agree that communities have the power to solve problems in the neighbourhood is important information for the field of community participation. This finding supports the idea that length of time in the country is doing something that affects sense of agency in relation to solving problems. Possible explanations may be linked to experience in activism, where people who are exposed to their own activism and that of others over time come to see the effects of their actions; through these changes, agency is learned and activism reinforced.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has presented analyses of activism in low-income racialized neighbourhoods in Toronto. Original survey data was examined to provide information about activist involvement, knowledge, identity and agency. In particular, these analyses examined data from immigrants to Canada, who made up a large proportion of the residents in these neighbourhoods.

The findings of the paper speak to factors that contribute to activism among immigrants, working to untangle individual, cohort and community group effects on who participates, what is being learned and how this can inform theories of active citizenship. Overall, the findings showed a relationship between years in Canada and activism, and while this effect was not positive and linear, we can conclude that something is being learned over the course of living in the country that is affecting patterns of community participation. This is further supported when examined at the level of the individual, where age is

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