# Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL)

# WORKING PAPER #5

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

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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.

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

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**Abstract:** This paper presents analyses of activism in low-income racialized neighbourhoods in Toronto, Canada. Using original survey data from the Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning project, the paper presents a specific model of active citizenship and considers its relevance to community activism among immigrants to Canada. Through the analyses of activist involvement, knowledge, identity and agency, it is concluded that there is a link between active citizenship and activism in the community. Activism opens up spaces and processes for people to learn important things related to citizenship, what it is, and how it is lived and learned. The findings have implications for adult and community education, toward building more effective and knowledgeable citizens who can work collectively in their communities around issues that concern them.

**Keywords**: citizenship, activism, anti-poverty organizing, learning, adult education, immigration

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

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to extend and deepen analyses and practices toward fuller citizenship and participation at local levels. Building upon a background of the 'deepening democracy' debate (e.g. Fung & Wright, 2001; Gaventa, 2006), this paper moves on from questions of how and why citizens engage to what happens when citizens do engage - what does active citizenship look like and how might we better understand the learning that brings citizenship into being?

Growing literature in citizenship studies presents concepts and empirical research on 'active citizenship', raising questions of how to link formal, non-formal and informal learning experiences to the development of active citizens. In this paper, I argue that community organizing is an important vehicle for citizenship learning and one of several valuable indicators of active citizenship. Through participation in anti-poverty activities and campaigns, activists are learning about membership, identity, agency and social power; people new to a country learn about and realize important examples of active citizenship through such activities. To support this claim, the paper will present a specific model of active citizenship and consider its relevance to original social

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 how citizenship is attained - where individuals develop and sustain a sense of citizenship across and throughout their life. Then the question becomes how to ensure that opportunities are provided for people to acquire these skills, abilities and knowledge.

### THE 'GOOD CITIZEN'

Citizenship has long been viewed as status, linked to nationality or possession of a passport (Schugurensky, 2006). This view frames citizenship as rights bestowed by the state and tends to concentrate on the values and responsibilities of the citizen, with particular emphasis on what good citizenship is and what good citizens do. The model of the 'good citizen'[i] is based on conceptualizations that emphasize moral values and social responsibility. Typically, it envisions citizenship as typified by *personally-*

*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 participation and commitment to the community, and has given rise to what is known as 'active citizenship.' Active citizenship has been used in citizenship theory (e.g. Jansen, Chioncel & Dekkers, 2006) as well as policy (ex. European Commission, 2009) signifying a practice that constitutes individuals as active agents as opposed to subjects of the state. Individuals are conceptualized as informed participatory actors who learn,

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 focus attention on directions and opportunities that can enable and increase agency and political efficacy.

Empirical evidence supports the agentive potential of citizenship education. This research has primarily consisted of evaluation of the outcomes or effects of formal citizen education programs, such as high school courses for youth or integration programs for new immigrants. A pan-European study of fifteen case studies found that citizenship education programs offer opportunities for transferring skills and information relevant to active citizenship (Haahr, 1997), yet the effects of formal citizenship education are dependent upon program design and implementation. Westheimer and Kahne (2004), in their empirical analysis of ten programs over a two year period, conclude that embedded politics and ideologies in program design and decision-making shape the impact of citizenship education on participation, critical analysis and collective action.

While formal education around active citizenship has been well-documented, informal and non-formal experiences of active citizenship remains an area in need of further exploration. Many examples of active citizenship take place in civil society - including neighbourhoods, communities and social organizations - yet there is very little work that documents or seeks to understand it in these contexts. Nevertheless, active citizenship has been loosely theorized to involve learning in different ways and places;

> Active citizenship involves learning by doing across a wide spectrum. Here we can perhaps trace a soft-hard continuum in civil society from local adult education classes or groups, to study-circles, to voluntary organization, to different types of community groups to social movements (Johnston, 1999, p.186).

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 pursuit of common objectives. The examination of community participation as activism is how ideas, individuals, events and organizations are linked in broader processes of collective action. According to some researchers, the analyses of these collection actions are inextricably linked to social movement phenomena, as people participate in actions together to drive social change (Della Porta & Diani, 2006).

The sociology of social movements has looked in depth at participation. It is a complex and broadly theorized topic, where different theories have been proposed to explain the processes by which people become engaged, understand their actions and find support to continue, and even how people come to disengage in collective action. These theories consist of: political process approaches, which recognize the central role of structural opportunity with special attention to the role of government and politics (e.g. McAdam, 1982; Tilly, 1995); strain and breakdown theories, where participation is triggered by people's assessment of relative deprivation (e.g. Buechler, 2007); network approaches, which examine the role of social networks on participation, both in supporting recruitment and as an antidote to leaving (e.g. Diani, 2007); and resource

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 correlated with involvement in other community activities, personal influence, sense of community, importance of sense of community, citizen duty, political efficacy, importance of the neighbourhood, self esteem and perception of problems.

It is no coincidence that many of the variables shown to be involved in social movement participation are the same factors discussed as most relevant to active citizenship. While community activism and active citizenship are not one and the same - active citizenship is unique in framing all aspects of 'community activity' in relation to civic, political and social rights - they share common dimensions such as group membership and identity.

Attention to social networks may be particularly salient to the overlapping nature of social movement studies and active citizenship. In this sense, we might say that central to community activism is the issue of membership, which has been shown to determine identities, affect social network bonds and strengthen involvement (Diani, 2007). Social movement participation is linked to personal change, a sense of empowerment and the strengthening of self, as well as a developing sense of community and bonds with others. This can work through processes of identity construction related to both self and collective identity. Activism is a process by which people recognize themselves as social actors and are recognized by others as part of broader groupings (Della Porta &

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 inclusion, which in turn encourages and motivates participation (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Through such social processes, individuals and groups are able to work toward social action.

## SOCIAL MOVEMENT LEARNING

Social action has an educative dimension, with learning occurring among people who are part of a social movement, as well as by people outside of the movement by extension of its action or very existence. This social movement learning has been noted to be a tool of the people and seen as learning *from* the world (Finger, 1989). The process by which learning occurs, however, is a topic of detailed analysis in social movement learning literature.

Social movement learning scholars have debated the nature of cognition and production of meaning. In critique of work that emphasized individual/psychological aspects of cognition, cultural analyses of social movements have looked at cognitive processes as collective, inter-individual, and situated within social networks (Krinsky, 2008). This social constructivist view understands meaning as being rooted in social relations and social actions, a product of the broader historical, social and political context in which it is carried out.

Theories of socio-cognitive processes are important in explaining social movement development and learning (Sawchuk, 2010). Rather than treat movement participation as a single, static, time-bound decision, participation is viewed as ongoing and part of a complex 'activity system' (Krinsky, 2008). This notion locates cognitive activity - both collective and individual - within a broader system and therefore inseparable from social struggle, contradiction, contestation and change. In examining the concrete and often

transformational learning that takes place in social movement activities, we are comprising a key branch of the 'learning-in-action' oriented literature.

## CITIZENSHIP LEARNING

### THEORIES OF LEARNING

The debate around the meaning of citizenship brings the sites in which it is attained into question. If the skills required for citizen engagement are something fundamental to our everyday lives and the broader societal context, it is critical to understand how citizenship is obtained or learned. It has been suggested that "we are not born aware of our citizen rights and responsibilities, and of the way to ensure that they are fulfilled in our respective communities" (Schugurensky, 2003, p.4). Rather, we need to *learn* about aspects of citizenship. *Citizenship learning* refers to the learning of knowledge, skills, attitude, values and competencies around what it means to be a citizen, broadly speaking (Schugurensky, 2003).

Citizenship learning can occur through formal learning, such as in organized education, courses and training, or through informal learning. Theorists suggest that informal learning is pervasive and powerful; the majority of learning takes place outside of organized formal courses (Colley, Hodkinson & Malcolm, 2003; Foley, 2001; Livingstone, 1999). Informal learning consists of anything learned by oneself or with other people, and can be purposeful or incidental, occurring by acting and reflecting on action.

Much of the current theory on learning citizenship stresses the importance of 'learning-in-action'. Gaventa (2006) says that citizenship is "attained through practice, based on different identities and struggles around concrete issues" (p.24). Similarly, Banaji (2008) suggests that the motivation for citizen action can be traced to life experiences, ideologies encountered and adopted, social contexts and communities. The acquisition of citizenship is considered a process that takes place through the lifespan (i.e. across the years) and across a variety of contexts (i.e. in a variety of formal and informal

learning settings). This model of citizenship learning has been coined "life-long and life-wide" by Schugurensky (personal communication, 2009), and mirrors Benn's (2000) assertion that citizenship skills can be learned in a multitude of settings and are transferable.

## LEARNING IN SOCIAL ACTION

Educational opportunities are pervasive in people's lives; struggles and learning are everywhere (Foley, 1999). Learning dimensions in community sites, including neighbourhoods, workplaces, educational institutions and families, can generate significant human learning "that enables people to make sense of and act on their environment, and to come to understand themselves as knowledge-creating, acting beings" (Foley, 2001, p.78).

Similar sorts of informal and incidental learning can be found in instances of social action. Learning in community organizing is embedded in the process and occurs continuously and spontaneously (Chovanec, 2006). Being implicit and incidental, informal learning is often hard to distinguish and measure, and may not be understood or recognized as learning (Foley, 2001). Nevertheless, theories and research on informal learning stress its prevalence and power. In order to further understand and facilitate learning in struggle, it is suggested that we find "whatever public spaces exist, no matter how small, and strength[en] and expand them" (Gaventa, 2006, p.22).

# ANTI-POVERTY COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND LEARNING PROJECT

## PROJECT OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

This paper uses the model of active citizenship to examine how people active in anti-poverty organizing approach citizen engagement and learning. It situates the concern in the Anti-Poverty Community Organizing and Learning (APCOL) project. APCOL is a community-university research project that aims "to develop an integrated, city-wide

perspective on community anti-poverty organizing efforts in the Greater Toronto"
(APCOL, 2011). Related analyses currently emerging from the APCOL project consist
of: examination of participatory approaches to anti-poverty research; processes of
community learning and mobilization; and theory of alienation in understanding social
movement activity.

The APCOL project employs a mixed-methods approach to research, including a
Toronto-wide quantitative survey and eight case studies over a 5-year period. Both the
quantitative community-centred survey and the qualitative case studies examine
descriptive and analytic accounts of community issues, organizing and education, with
emphasis put on understanding how people *learn* to engage, re-engage, as well as
remain unengaged in various forms of anti-poverty activism.

Following the overall methodology of the project, this paper approaches the subject of
citizenship from a mixed-methods approach, using data from the quantitative-qualitative
survey up to this point in time (n=110).

OUTLINE

Using original survey data, the paper presents analyses of a sampling of activists and
non-activists living in two neighbourhoods in Toronto. The analyses draw primarily on
data from activist respondents, in order to examine and better understand how various
dimensions of activism are linked to active citizenship. Community activists are
traditionally considered a challenging social group to study through survey methods
(Della Porta, 2007). Activists' connection to formal organizations remains highly uneven
and the lack of a known population from which to build casual sampling affects the
means by which to contact them on a suitable scale. As such, the construction of usable
samples persistently presents challenges to survey researchers.

While the issue of active citizenship includes everyone (i.e. Canadian-born and
immigrants), the focus of this paper is on immigrants to Canada. These immigrants may

be of any immigration status: Canadian citizen, landed immigrant or 'other'. The category of 'other' can contain refugees, migrant workers, undocumented immigrants, and so forth. The decision to focus on immigrants to Canada in this paper is based on specific challenges to citizenship and participation that are faced by immigrant groups. With the prevalence of a legal framework to citizenship in our society, these groups are the least likely to be seen as being citizens in the eyes of the law, other members of society, and perhaps even immigrants themselves. Active citizenship, as a multi-dimensional approach, puts emphasis on elements beyond legal status, and thus may be a particularly relevant and interesting focus of analysis for immigrant groups. There may be specific challenges and potential for how people new to a country learn about and realize important examples of active citizenship. This paper hopes to explore that through lived experience in community activism.

The paper begins with a demographic picture of the survey sample and contextualizes it within the scope of the city of Toronto. This is followed by a series of analyses of activist survey data that each focus on a different dimension of active citizenship. Overall, the findings section is organized as an accumulation of related but distinctive analyses.

More specifically, the paper examines how length of time in the country affects community activism among immigrants to Canada. The analysis also considers participation in relation to age and ethnic/racial community, outlining how individual, cohort and community group aspects are related to activism.

In the next section, the paper examines reported knowledge of social or political issues, to gain insight on immigrant activists' perceptions of the learning that takes place in activism. This discussion helps us to understand the processes occurring during community participation and how aspects have the potential to encourage or discourage engagement.

The following section deals with the question of intention to stay in the neighbourhood. It presents an analysis of activists' and non-activists' plans to stay or leave the

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 Greater Toronto, 2005; United Way of Greater Toronto, 2011).

The survey sample consisted of 56.4% female, 42.7% male; the age ranging from 19 to 79 years, with a mean of 43 (SD = 14.9). Participants reported racial identities of White (32.7%), Black (31.8%), South Asian (17.3%), Arab/West Asian (4.5%), Aboriginal (2.7%), South East Asian (1.8%) and other (7.3%).

The survey sample contained 42.7% born in Canada, and 54.5% born outside of Canada. Twenty-eight countries of origin were reported by participants, with the top countries consisting of India, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka. Of those born outside of Canada, residency in Canada ranged from 2 months to 50 years, with a mean of 16.0 years (SD = 11.4). The sample consisted of Canadian citizens (83.6%), landed immigrants (10.0%) and 'other' (4.5%).

Other demographic factors are important to creating a profile of the survey sample. With respect to highest level of education completed, 25.5% have a university degree (undergraduate/graduate), 18.2% a college/CEGEP/non-university diploma, 3.6% an apprentice/trades diploma, 13.6% a secondary (high) school diploma, and 20.9% some secondary (high school).

Employment status showed that 48.2% are unemployed, 15.5% employed part-time, 10.0% employed full-time, 9.1% self-employed, 6.4% retired and 3.6% employed in two or more jobs. The main source of income during the past 12 months was reported to be: employment/self-employment (40.9%), social assistance/welfare (16.4%), disability pension (16.4%), retirement pensions (4.5%), employment insurance (2.7%), other (2.7%) and no income (2.7%).

The estimate of total household income (before deductions) during the past 12 months showed the largest two income groups being in the lowest brackets: 23.6% with less than $10,000, and 18.2% between $10,000-$19,000. This data would put over 40% of the survey sample into Statistic Canada's Low-Income Cut-off (LICO), which is $20,778 for a single person and $38,610 for a family of four. This data can be compared to the

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 Income | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| < $10K | 26 | 23.6 |
| $10-19K | 20 | 18.2 |
| $20-29K | 10 | 9.1 |
| $30-39K | 4 | 3.6 |
| $40-49K | 8 | 7.3 |
| $50-59K | 2 | 1.8 |
| $60-69K | 4 | 3.6 |
| $70-79K | 1 | .9 |
| $80-89K | 1 | .9 |
| $90-99K | 0 | 0 |
| $100K+ | 2 | 1.8 |
| DK | 24 | 21.8 |
| Ref | 8 | 7.3 |
| Total | 110 | 100 |

Table 1: Income Status of Survey Respondents

As we can see from the demographics, the survey sample consisted of a highly racialized group, with well-established residency in Canada, moderate to high levels of formal education, high levels of unemployment and part-time employment, and high frequencies of low income.

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. The untangling of individual, cohort and community effects is important.

Among immigrants who are very new to Canada (1-5 years), there is no difference between frequencies of activism (50%) and non-activism (50%). Immigrants who have lived in Canada for longer periods of time, however, seem to have an increased likelihood of being involved in community activism. Figure 1 shows a graph representing the frequencies of people involved and not involved in community activism by years in Canada:

As we can see from the graph below, cohorts who have been in Canada for longer periods of time have a higher frequency of activism. There seems to be an overall trend of increasing frequencies of activism as immigrants live in Canada for a longer period of time. This trend, however, is not simply positive and linear in its progression. A cross-tab analysis shows that of the 58 cases of people who were born in other countries and moved to Canada, different involvement in community activism was reported depending on length of time in Canada: 8.6% of activists have been in Canada for 1-5 years; 13.8% of activists have been in Canada for 6-10 years; 22.4% activists have been in Canada for 11-20 years, and 19% of activists have been in Canada for over 21 years.
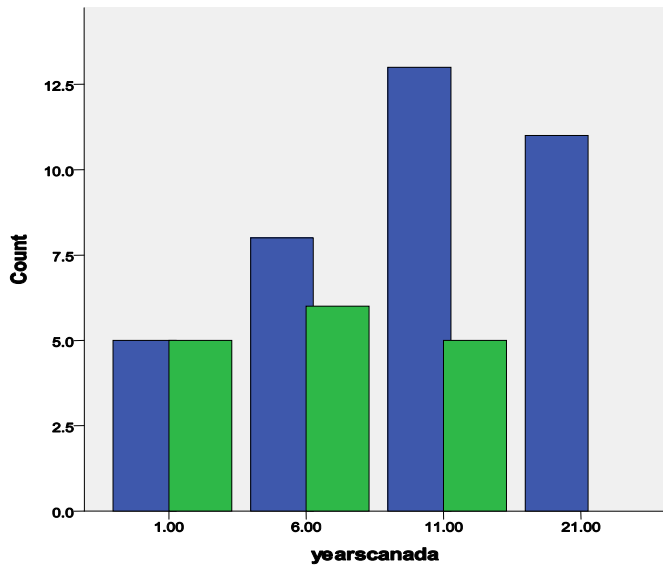
Figure 1: Years in Canada and Activism

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 perception of problems and knowledge of issues or community activities. It may be that as people are in the country for longer periods of time, they become more aware of things going on in their neighbourhood, they identify with their communities and want to affect change, or they gain knowledge, skill and a sense of agency to get involved. Further examination of these areas, explored in the subsequent findings presented in this paper will, however, provide greater insight into the relationship between years in Canada and community activism.

It is interesting to note that while these findings suggest that length of time in Canada is roughly positively correlated with involvement in activism, it seems to have a limit. The data shows a decrease in activism among the cohort who has lived in Canada for the longest period of time (over 21 years). This drop-off point suggests that there is something going on among people who have been in Canada for a long time for activism to taper off. What is it about being in Canada for more extended periods of time that is related to a decrease in activism? One possible answer to this question can be

hypothesized to be related to demographic variables, such as age or health. Another answer to this question – one which is likely not mutually exclusive to the first, may be related to activists getting tired, discouraged, having less connection to community activity, or losing their sense of efficacy.

An analysis was conducted to explore the question of age as distinct from years in Canada. Using data from all immigrants to Canada, a look at activism across different age cohorts shows that activism involvement increases by age. Table 2 shows the percentages of activists by age cohort:

| Age | Percent within age cohort involved in activism |
|---|---|
| Under 20 | 0% |
| 21-35 | 56.3% |
| 36-50 | 64.7% |
| 51-65 | 75% |
| Over 65 | 100% |

Table 2: Age and Activism

The positive correlation between age and activism provides support for the hypothesis that community participation is related to some type of change occurring over time, such as increased social networks, knowledge or skill throughout the lifespan. As one ages they may be learning how to be active. This finding is explored further in subsequent sections in an attempt to understand what exactly is being learned by individuals, cohorts and community groups to affect participation, and by what processes.

Within a discussion of immigrants to Canada, it is necessary to explore elements pertaining to ethnic/racial dimensions of a community. In order to examine ethnic/racial community group differences around the question of activism, an analysis on two key exemplars was conducted. This consisted of the examination of data from the Jamaican community, a long-established ethnic/racial community[ii], and the Indian (South Asian) community, that in relation to the history of immigration in Canada is less long-

established. For the analysis, these two ethnic communities were chosen as exemplars as either 'established' or 'recent' based on patterns in Canadian immigration history. Jamaicans started arriving in Canada in large numbers after 1962, when an immigration policy change removed nationality as the main criterion for immigration, thus lessening overt racial discrimination in policy (Boyd, 1976). Waves of immigrants from India started arriving in the 1980's and 1990's, following introduction of the point system in 1978 and subsequent immigration changes to increase family reunification.

| | Ethnic Community | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Jamaican** | **Indian** |
| **Activism involvement** | 80% | 60% |
| **Canadian citizen** | 100% | 80% |
| **Gender** | 80% female | 60% female |
| **Age (mean, in years)** | 42 | 44 |
| **Visible minority (self-identified)** | 80% | 20% |
| **Employment status** | 60% employed (f/t, self-employment, 2+ jobs) | 40% employed (p/t) |
| **Education completed** | 80% post-sec. educ | 40% post-sec. educ |
| **Disability (self-identified)** | 0% | 20% |

Table 3: Ethnic Community and Demographic Variables

Within this survey sample, Jamaicans and Indians were two of the largest ethnic community groups in the sample. A demographic analysis of the sample supports Jamaicans as an 'established' community, with a mean of 30 years in Canada; whereas Indians were a more 'recent' community, with a mean of 14.1 years in Canada.

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 not[iii], 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.

Findings show that 73% of all immigrant community activists report that they have learned something related to knowledge about social or political issues from their community activities. When looking specifically at knowledge of social or political issues in relation to years in Canada, data shows higher levels for cohorts who have been in Canada for 6-10 and 11-20 years, compared to those here for shorter (1-5 years) or longer (over 21 years) periods of time. Table 4 shows percentages by cohort:

| Years in Canada | Percent who learned knowledge about social or political issues |
|---|---|
| 1-5 years | 60.0% |
| 6-10 years | 85.7% |
| 11-20 years | 92.3% |
| Over 21 years | 54.5% |

Table 4: Years in Canada and Knowledge about Social or Political Issues

As the table above shows, there is a trend toward increasing percentages of people who report that they gain knowledge about social and political activity in relation to years in Canada; up to a certain point, the longer the cohort has been in Canada, the more likely they are to report learning knowledge from activism. This relationship changes after year 20, when reported knowledge decreases in the cohort of activists who have been in Canada for over 21 years.

Overall, the findings about knowledge gained from activism supports the idea that people are learning critical things about society and politics from community activism. The integration of action and learning seems particularly salient for immigrants who have been in Canada for 11-20 years, and brings forward the question of what it is about this cohort that they report gaining political and social knowledge more than other cohorts. Conversely, the decline in reported learning of social and political issues

among those who have been in Canada for over 21 years calls for further inquiry about the processes by which they become (or remain) engaged and with what effect. A possible explanation is that those who have been in Canada for a long period of time feel they have already learned everything there is to know about social and political issues (whether this is a great deal or limited in scope), and do not attribute their learning to their involvement in activism.

## INTENTION TO STAY IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

An analysis of data from all immigrants to Canada (both activists and non-activists) found that approximately half (51.7%) report that they plan to stay in their neighbourhood for the next 1-5 years. The reported intentions dropped considerably with respects to other neighbourhood plans: 6.9% of immigrants plan to stay for 6-10 years; 0% plan to stay to 11-20 years; and 1.7% plan to stay for over 21 years. Furthermore, there was a large percentage (37.9%) that responded 'don't know' to the question of intention to stay in their neighbourhood.

The response of 'don't know' is particularly interesting, as the survey question is measuring personal intention. 'Don't know' can be construed as something that the individual has never given thought to, is considering but remains undecided, or has no intention to stay in the neighbourhood. By product of this uncertainty, we can consider that those responding 'don't know' may have even less intention to stay in the neighbourhood than any of the other responses. It is quite possible that this group may be intending to leave the neighbourhood as soon as they are able to.

To determine if involvement in community activism played a role on immigrants' intention to stay in their neighbourhood, an analysis was run comparing data from activists and non-activists. Intention to stay in the neighbourhood was found to have an interesting and complicated relationship with activism. In figure 2 below, we can see that activists are more likely than non-activists to have plans to stay in the neighbourhood for 1-5 years, as well as have plans to stay for over 21 years. The reversal effect is shown

among the cohort who has been in Canada for 6-10 years. For this cohort, activists are less likely to have plans to stay in the neighbourhood than non-activists.
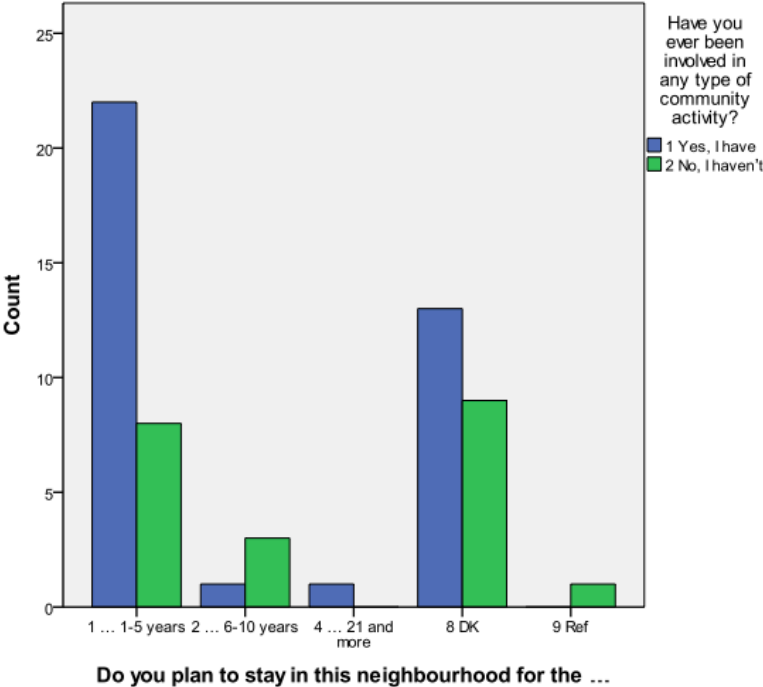


Figure 2: Intention to Stay in the Neighbourhood and Activism

In this sample, the cohort who is planning to stay in the neighbourhood for 1-5 years, as well as those without plans ('don't know' response), are most likely to participate in community activism. Having a deeper understanding of the specific cohorts who, overwhelmingly, participate in community activism can shed light on why some people are orienting to stay in the neighbourhood and others are orienting to leaving and/or report no firm plans one way or another.

These analyses bring up questions around community building, and whether or not people who are involved in activism are doing so based on their orientation to stay and, perhaps, build a better community where they are. There may be factors and processes such as community identification, sense of belonging, social networks and resources that creates conditions for certain groups to work toward community building. While the

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 | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1-5 | 66.7% | 0% | 33.3% |
| 6-10 | 55.6% | 0% | 44.4% |
| 11-20 | 70.0% | 0% | 30.0% |
| Over 20 | 80.0% | 0% | 20.0% |

Table 5: Years in Canada and Social Power to Identify Ways to Solve Problems

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

positively correlated with activism, and the level of the community, where well-established ethnic/racial communities have higher levels of reported activism.

Conclusions that age, time and notion of community are related to participation support the claim that activism opens up spaces and processes for people to learn important things related to being active citizens. This paper further explored dimensions of active citizenship - namely knowledge, identity and agency - which provide information on the processes by which citizenship is lived and learned. Analyses on knowledge of social and political issues, intention to stay in the neighbourhood and social power provided valuable information on the learning occurring in social action, and identified areas where more investigation is needed.

Overall, the analyses in this paper provided a picture of the factors that are related to activism among immigrants to Canada, and more importantly, support for the role of community organizing to citizenship learning. Community organizing is varied and complex in practice; so too are its effects. Nevertheless, the findings presented in this paper demonstrate that activism is a vehicle by which people learn about knowledge, identity and agency. This process of learning is individual, collective, inter-individual and situated; it is learning-in-action as part of a broader civic, social and political context.

The issue of active citizenship is critical for understanding how people understand and use their civic, social and political rights, and how one orients to issues and works on solving problems in local contexts. The findings from this paper have important implications for adult and community education. By finding ways that can facilitate citizenship learning, we can work toward building more effective and knowledgeable citizens who can work collectively in their communities around issues that concern them. This paper utilises an approach of examining learning that is going on in everyday life: learning occurring across multiple spheres of activity; learning that is self-directed, collective and tacit; and learning that happens in complex, contradictory and contested environments. It demonstrates how people new to a country learn about and realize what active citizenship is.

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[i] The term "good citizen" has been used across the past century in a variety of contexts and cultures. For an overview of the image of "The Good Citizen" relevant to this discussion, see Westheimer and Kahne (2004).

[ii] For an overview of issues around Jamaican immigration and integration to Canada, see Murdie, Chambon, Hulchanski & Teixeira (1995)

[iii] Data on visible minority status identification among Indians show a breakdown of: 20% yes visible minority; 40% no; 20% don't know and 20% refuse to answer.

[iv] The survey section on social power was not asked to non-activists, therefore no data is available and this group was excluded from this analysis.