

## **Implications of Community Activism among Urban Minority Young People for Education for Engaged and Critical Citizenship**

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### **Abstract**

Citizenship is fundamentally defined by praxis--i.e., engagement in local and diverse forms of civic practices--rather than by a legal status tied to the nation-state (Tully, 2008). This study examined the participatory democracy practices of a community activist group that was organizing to resist gentrification in a Puerto Rican community in Chicago in the U.S. In order to preserve their Puerto Rican community and build a grassroots democracy practice, the young activists involved themselves in a variety of community issues, ranging across political, socio-cultural, and educational domains. Noticeably, they worked to engage local youth in community events and in the process of production and distribution of local information. This helped the youth to learn about important community issues, as well as Puerto Rican history and culture, which had not been taught in local public schools. Such intergenerational and holistic educational activities not only produced new young leaders but in fact created a pipeline of community leadership. Their efforts present a useful educational model of engaged and critical citizenship, demonstrating the unique contributions of learning beyond the classroom.

**Keywords:** Community activism, Urban minority youth, Critical citizenship

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## Introduction

Citizenship fundamentally concerns a particular way of being, i.e., praxis. It is not only about a legal status tied to the nation-state but more importantly about how to become a particular kind of a person in a certain context. Through participating in civic life and interacting with others, people learn important values, norms, language, and practice, which constitute diverse and situated forms of civic practice according to different social contexts (Tully, 2008). Unfortunately, to a great extent, current citizenship education in schools has been missing such a sense, resulting in a large disconnect from communal life. Primarily concerned with a passive and institutionalized form of citizenship tied to the nation-state, current citizenship education manages to produce compliant nationals, but falls short of producing engaged and critical citizens. This paper stresses the importance of community engagement in education for engaged and critical citizenship with a consideration of the unconventional notion of citizenship, or praxis-based citizenship. Of the many forms of community engagement, I place special attention on community activism among minority young people, because of its strong advocacy for social justice from the bottom up. I conducted a case study of a community activist group that organized to preserve Puerto Rican cultural heritage and space in Chicago's inner city in the face of gentrification.

### Citizenship as Praxis

The classical meaning of praxis is rooted in Aristotle's idea of *phronesis* (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Smith, 1994). *Phronesis* concerns practical knowledge, practical ethics, or value judgment as a departure for action. It focuses on what is valuable, on that which cannot be encapsulated by universal rules, and on specific cases (p. 57). Being or becoming a citizen thus entails moral and political questions and practice contingent on the particular context in which a person resides.

No singular universal form of citizenship exists according to this perspective. On the contrary, praxis-based citizenship concerns situated and diverse forms of practice in local contexts, not necessarily tied to the nation-state. Praxis-based citizenship is also constructed out of an agent's active and ongoing engagement with other people; people develop their own civic practices according to different social contexts—ways of interacting with others, sets of civic values and norms, communication tools, uses of civic language, and more (Tully, 2008). Such civic practices are not static but changing through ongoing negotiation processes among people. People *civicize* themselves and become citizens as they engage in such ongoing and varied civic practices. Tully (2008) said:

Since civic activities of citizens are primary, people do not become citizens by virtue of a status defined by rights and guaranteed by the institutions of the modern state and international law. This status is simply to be a 'subject' of that system of laws and a 'member' of that association. Individual and collective agents become citizens only by virtue of actual participation in civic activities. Through apprenticeship in citizenship practices they acquire the linguistic and non-linguistic abilities, modes of conduct and interaction in relationships with others, forms of awareness of self and other, and the use of civic equipment that are constitutive of citizenship (p. 29).

Unfortunately, this notion of citizenship—that is, praxis-based and constructed through community engagement—is not widely accepted in society. The dominant idea is that of modern liberal citizenship, which is a universal and institutionalized form of citizenship based on constitutional law within the nation-state. It is usually viewed in a passive and narrow sense as merely a legal status (Tully, 2008). This tendency is reflected in the school curriculum as well; citizenship education in schools is often dry, dull, and largely disconnected from students' real lives. Citizenship is taught mainly as a legal status that

grants the right to vote. Although voting is apparently the most common and formal form of political participation in the modern representative democratic system, there are many other forms of civic engagement required to uphold democracy. Yet, in many cases, civic education in schools rarely focuses on how to participate in grassroots and participatory practice; make change; or learn the particular norms, values, or civic languages of everyday relationships with others. Arguably, this disconnect at school between learning and real life may be responsible for the growing gap between school-constructed citizenship and the citizenship actually practiced in the community (Knight-Abowitz & Harnish, 2006).

In particular, youth of color have faced an even larger gap, due to textbooks and curricula that are still primarily Eurocentric, as well as social prejudices surrounding them both inside and outside school. Meanwhile, the last decade has witnessed a dramatic movement towards community activism among urban minority young people in order to address issues such as educational justice, school reform, and racism, all of which heavily affect their daily lives. Such grassroots movements are important not only because they promote social justice and participatory democracy in society but also because they become significant civic educational practices in themselves. I am particularly interested in the vital potential of community activism for cultivating engaged and critical citizenship, i.e. citizenship as praxis.

### **Community Activism among Minority Young People**

Youth of color have been largely ignored in mainstream literature surrounding youth development and citizenship education. They have often been characterized negatively, portrayed as being vulnerable to crime and social pathology, with a primary focus on prevention programs (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002). However, during the past decades young urban minority people have taken a leading role in creating a new participatory culture. They have actively organized grassroots movements to address issues important to them, which chiefly concern deep-rooted racism and fighting against social prejudices associated with them. Known by various names such as youth organizing, youth-led community organizing, community organizing, and community activism, this movement highlights the willingness of the people of the community to voice their issues themselves from the subject position, rather than allow their issues to be represented by others from the outside. Such grassroots democracy practice can help participants “see themselves as actors with the potential to resist oppression, see their peers and local community as potential collaborators in collective action, and see their community as a source of resources and a site for building collective power for social change” (Schutz, 2006, p. 725). The theory and practice of this movement including community activism is largely influenced from Saul Alinsky (1971) and Paulo Freire (2000), and community activism is also considered to be one of many civic practices to realize participatory democracy.

It is important to note that as community activism has helped young participants link their everyday life experiences to broader socio-economic issues concerning social discrimination, economic poverty, and other forms of oppression, they could foster critical consciousness, social skills, leadership, social responsibility, and community action, referred to as critical civic praxis. These educational fruits in turn could be a solid foundation for becoming agents of social change (Akom, Cammarota, & Ginwright, 2008; Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007; Middaugh & Civic Engagement Research Group, 2012; Morrell, 2006; Romero, Cammarota, Dominguez, Valdez, Ramirez, & Hernandez, 2008; Torre & Fine, 2006).

Significantly, community activism has had a prolonged impact on participants' future civic engagement orientation, too. In Warren, Mira, and Nikundiwe (2008), young activists who had successfully organized previous campaigns later came back to their communities as

adult community leaders. In Ginwright (2010), young people who were involved in organizing displayed higher levels of commitment to future activism as adults than did other students in a national sample. More than 90% of young people in the survey expressed a desire to stay involved in activism and remain committed to long-term social change efforts. Ginwright viewed youth organizing as playing a critical role in producing a leadership pipeline for social justice in the community.

In brief, community activism is a natural civic venue where people participate in important social issues, learn unique civic practices and culture, cultivate critical consciousness, and become active citizens in their local settings. In spite of such significance, however, community activism has rarely been discussed in connection with citizenship education, purportedly because it has been considered an unconventional and radical area. This paper challenges such a conservative tendency found in current citizenship education and re-envision education for engaged and critical citizenship. To this end, I conducted a qualitative case study about the participatory democracy practices of a community activist group that organized to fight against gentrification in an urban Puerto Rican immigrant community in Chicago, USA.

## Methods

**The case:** This paper is based on a case study (Stake, 1995) about a community activist group in Chicago that organized to resist gentrification in the community. The case of this study is the “¡Huntington Park NO SE VENDE!” (Huntington Park Not For Sale, HPNSV) Campaign in Huntington Park, an urban area of Chicago known to be a Puerto Rican community for the past fifty years. Huntington Park had survived several previous displacements that demolished other Puerto Rican communities in Chicago, but in the mid-1990s, Huntington Park was hit by another city redevelopment plan, euphemistically referred to as “urban renewal” (Rinaldo, 2002). Developers were buying old houses at low prices and replacing them with new condominiums to be sold at high prices. This brought newcomers, mostly middle-class white people, to the community, while long-term working class residents were pushed out because they could not afford the rising rent or property taxes. This phenomenon ostensibly divided the community into white people and Puerto Ricans, although issues of gentrification in Huntington Park were much more complicated than they appeared on the surface.

HPNSV was born out of a youth organizing group called *Barrio Urbano* (often simply referred to as *Barrio*). *Barrio* was founded in 2002 by a group of local youth to provide youth a space where they could express their feelings and thoughts through performing poetry, spoken word, hip-hop music, dance, etc. Such cultural activism became an integral conduit through which youth became connected to talented peers, encouraged each other, and defied the social prejudices and oppressions imposed on Puerto Rican and Latina/o youth.<sup>7</sup> *Barrio* youth leaders also became interested in important issues of the community, especially gentrification, and in the fall of 2003, the youth leaders, including Richard, who was one of the two co-founders of *Barrio*, began internal discussions about ways to address important local issues and redefine politics at the grassroots level. The youth leaders were impressed with experiments with democracy at the local, direct, and everyday level in Latin America, such as the Zapatista movement in Mexico and a participatory budgeting model in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The youth leaders’ focus was on the adaptation and implementation of such alternative democracy models in their own community, so that the local people can participate more actively in the policy-making process at the micro- level.

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<sup>7</sup> More detail about *Barrio* is available in a book chapter, “From hip-hop to humanization: Batey Urbano as a space for Latino youth culture and community action” (Flores-Gonzalez, Rodriguez, and Rodriguez-Muñiz, 2006).

Gentrification was one of the most pressing issues in the community. Many people who had lived in the community for a long time were forced to move out due to rising rent and property taxes. At the time, many residents of the community did not have enough information about what was really happening and how to appropriately react to it. In 2004, the Huntington Park Participatory Democracy Project (often referred to by participants as the PD project) was officially launched in order to meet urgent needs of the community and ultimately to preserve the oldest Puerto Rican community in Chicago. Before long, the PD group adopted a new slogan: “¡Huntington Park NO SE VENDE!” (Huntington Park, Not for Sale!) After changing their name, they received more attention from residents of the community; most HPNSV activists viewed the new name as educative and representative of the work of HPNSV.

The Puerto Rican Community Center (PRCC) is another important piece of background for this case study. HPNSV was one of the initiatives of the PRCC, which had worked hard to serve the social and cultural needs of the community since it was founded in 1973. The PRCC ran many programs, including a high school, a daycare center, a community health center, a youth organizing group, and an afterschool program. The PRCC championed the Puerto Rican nationalist movement, and the key HPNSV members also strongly supported the independence of Puerto Rico.

I learned about Huntington Park and HPNSV through the Youth Community Informatics Project of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (GSLIS) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where I worked as a research assistant for three years. As I became more familiar with Huntington Park, I became fascinated with their active community movements and decided to study them with regards to critical and engaged citizenship. The main research question of this study was: What particular sense of citizenship is being constructed surrounding the “¡Huntington Park NO SE VENDE!” (HPNSV) Campaign in Huntington Park at Chicago?

**Data sources and analysis.** During data collection from January 2010 to mid-June 2010, I observed events HPNSV organized and participated in to see how they interacted with people, groups, and agencies within and outside the community in addressing their own issues. I looked into artifacts related to HPNSV, including *La Opinión*, the local newspaper issued and circulated by HPNSV, Facebook pages, flyers, video clips, books of poetry, murals, students’ reflection notes, etc., to see what messages were delivered to whom and in what ways. I interviewed adult participants to understand their motivations for involvement, roles, visions for HPNSV, and ideas for useful local strategies. The five key HPNSV activists were Luis, Juana, Karla, Quinn, and Richard, and they ranged in age from their mid-twenties to their early thirties. Luis, Juana, Karla, and Richard were Puerto Rican, as well as former youth leaders at *Barrio*. Quinn was ethnically Mexican, and also had an activist background in issues of LGBTQ and poverty.

I began data analysis by organizing interview transcripts and observation notes. Because HPNSV was involved in such a wide range of community work, I created four domains—political, anti-gentrification, cultural-social, and educational—to more effectively analyze the community work of HPNSV. Table 1 shows the basic data analysis. Major themes in each domain emerged as data organizing progressed.

Table 1  
 HPNSV Data Analysis

The community work of HPNSV	Political	Anti-gentrification	Cultural—Social	Educational (Youth-focused)
Strategic purposes	Expanding influence into the electoral political realm	Specific efforts for anti-gentrification	A process of an identification	Producing leaders for the next generation
Main themes	The “one foot in and one foot out”  Racism-prejudices over HPNSV  Building a relationship with community residents	Collaborating with others  Building a relationship with community residents	Reassuring the Puerto Rican identity  Inter-generational interaction	Civic apprenticeship

### Findings: Participatory democracy in Huntington Park

The most notable finding is that HPNSV activists viewed HPNSV to be not merely about anti-gentrification but also about building a different model of grassroots democracy in the community. This was the reason that HPNSV involved a wide range of community work, spanning political, cultural, and educational domains, in addition to the work immediately related to anti-gentrification. Below, I present the various kinds of work HPNSV did for the community according to the four domains: specific anti-gentrification, political, cultural-social, and educational.

**Specific anti-gentrification efforts: Education and collaboration.** In the earlier days of HPNSV, many community residents did not know detailed regulations about housing policies, and many of them barely spoke English. They were therefore susceptible to being taken advantage of by developers, who sought to obtain their properties at extremely low prices. Providing information on property owners’ rights and free legal services therefore became the most important task HPNSV had to carry out. In 2004, HPNSV published a two-sided flyer, called *La Opinión*, to provide such information. Over the years, *La Opinión* developed its contents to a wider range of issues from education, health, and local politics to culture, in addition to housing issues in the community. By 2010, its average edition was about twenty pages long, and it was published monthly in print and web versions. *La Opinión* was distributed door-to-door to the Huntington Park neighborhood by HPNSV, their supporters, and local teens. Offline *La Opinión* distribution was critical for many community residents, due to their limited internet access. HPNSV actively used community festivals to disseminate local information including *La Opinión*; the traditional method of information distribution was still valued by many people, especially the older generation.

Public affordable housing was one of the most promising alternatives for coping with gentrification. HPNSV organized a door-knocking event to obtain signatures from community residents supporting the construction of public affordable apartments. These signatures were to be used to push elected politicians to pass a bill to approve the construction of public

affordable housing. For this event, HPNSV formed collaborations with the neighboring community that was facing the same fate of gentrification. The new apartments were planned to stand on the border of the Huntington Park community and its neighboring community.

HPNSV recruited volunteers for the event in many different ways, including social media such as Facebook, as well as existing partnerships with universities. They offered a series of workshops to train volunteers to provide correct information about public housing. These workshops also taught people various important issues of Huntington Park, from the history of the Huntington Park community, the philosophy of HPNSV/the PRCC, the importance of door-knocking, how to do door-knocking, the need for public affordable housing, and a strict screening process for the residents of public affordable apartments. In particular, HPNSV and its partner tried to dismiss the myth about public affordable apartments that prevailed mostly among business owners and the affluent: "Public affordable apartments will make the community the 'dumping ground of poverty.'" These people believed that public affordable apartments would cause an influx of black and brown people into the community, which would in turn ghettoize the community. However, the truth was that public affordable apartments would be created for families that earn between \$22,800 and \$44,000 a year. Given that the median income in the community at that time was \$36,245, public affordable apartments would be suitable for families that earn the same amount as those already living in the neighborhood. In order to dispel the myth, it was of utmost importance for HPNSV and its collaborators to disseminate this accurate information to community residents.

These workshops and the door-knocking event were not merely mobilizing strategies to achieve short-term goals. HPNSV used these opportunities both for informal educational spaces for the community residents including volunteers and for building solid relationships with the community residents by showing them their commitment to the real issues of the community.

**Political domain: "One foot in and one foot out."** A local primary election was held at the beginning of the data collection period. The election became overheated by conflicts between two groups: the one endorsed by the PRCC and working against gentrification and the one supported by developers who wanted to redevelop the community in a different way.

Cynicism and a low sense of political efficacy were among the toughest challenges for HPNSV. According to HPNSV activists, many community residents believed that all politicians are corrupt and selfish, so that their votes would not make any difference. Also, oftentimes people were not patient enough to understand the slow process of community work. Luis, a coordinator of HPNSV, said that even though community residents were concerned about rising rents, they were scarcely motivated to participate in making a collective effort to change the system. Such cynicism and a low sense of political efficacy led to low turnouts in elections, too.

HPNSV activists firmly believed in the importance of electoral politics to make changes in public policy regarding housing and urban planning, and they actively participated in the electoral campaign. They encouraged people to vote for people who would truly respect the community and contribute to long-term development, while enduring the opponent group's black propaganda attacking them as an "anti-yuppie racist organization." *La Opinión* offered useful information related to the election, the candidates, and their platforms, in order to garner interest in local politics. The outcome of the election turned out to be that community residents favored all of the candidates endorsed by the PRCC and HPNSV, which showed that many people in the community still appreciated the work that the PRCC did for the community.

Richard, one of the co-founders of *Barrio* and HPNSV, talked about their attitude during their participation in the electoral campaign, using the “one foot in, one foot out” metaphor:

You have one foot in, one foot out. The one foot in the system and then one foot used for critically looking at the system, but your end is not really that you’re going to stay in the system. The end is to transform the system.

This “one foot in, one foot out” metaphor represented not only their electoral participation but also the whole body of HPNSV’s (and the PRCC’s) work to make a real change in the community.

**Cultural and social domain: “The process of identification.”** Puerto Rican identity was an important foundation on which community residents claimed cultural ownership of the Huntington Park area. Huntington Park had long been known as a Puerto Rican community, and gentrification was regarded as a serious attempt to demolish their ethnic identity and presence in U.S. mainstream society. Also, in light of the Puerto Rican nationalist tendency of HPNSV, preserving Huntington Park was about more than simply occupying a physical space. It strongly symbolized resistance to U.S. colonialism and actualization of Puerto Rican independence in the community.

Rose (2000) said, “Community is not given, but must be built, made real, and brought into being by campaigns of consciousness raising, pressure groups, and community activists.” Specifically, cultural events played a key role in making the community real to people by creating a sense of belonging and reaffirmation of ethnic identity amongst community residents, which was what Rose called “the process of identification.” HPNSV participated in many cultural and social events organized by the PRCC, *Barrio*, and other PRCC affiliates to reaffirm Puerto Rican identity and cultural ownership of the space in the community. There was a wide spectrum of cultural events, all of which showcased the dynamic aspects of Puerto Rican culture and identity. Some were very political, such as a month-long community event held in March called “30 Years Behind the Bar,” commemorating two Puerto Rican political prisoners who had been incarcerated for about 30 years. Other events, such as community festivals, parades, and *Parranda* (a Christmas tradition in Puerto Rico) exhibited various beautiful features of Puerto Rican culture. These community festivals provided HPNSV with chances to reach out to a broader audience by making in-person contacts, distributing local information, and fundraising.

*Barrio* was one of the main spaces for these cultural events. The key HPNSV activists, Luis and Juana, maintained their connection to *Barrio* by attending *Barrio*’s cultural events on Friday nights. Youth leaders at *Barrio*—aging from mid-teens to early twenties—organized and advertised the Friday cultural events, in which their peers showcased their artistic talents and freely expressed their feelings and thoughts. HPNSV activists were aware of the potential of *Barrio*’s cultural activism for both present and future community activism, and they wanted such energy to pass over to the younger generation. In particular, Luis always tried to get local teens involved in these cultural events through an afterschool program where he worked as a coordinator. This is discussed in more detail in the next section.

**Educational domain: The ecology of civic learning for youth.** One of the pivotal features of the HPNSV’s community work is its effort to further intergenerational and transformative learning for the local youth.

*Youth community engagement through ICLAC.* Luis, a coordinator of HPNSV, oversaw an afterschool program called the Institute of Culture, Leadership, Arts, and



Communication (ICLAC), also affiliated with the PRCC. ICLAC served Puerto Rican and Latina/o youth in Huntington Park to promote positive youth development and community engagement. It offered five classes, including four media classes (radio, journalism, multimedia, and theater) and a Participatory Democracy (PD) class. Luis devoted the whole ICLAC program to community engagement. He also taught the PD class on Mondays, where students learned about important issues, culture, and history of the community. Besides the PD class, ICLAC included many community-based learning activities to help raise youth interest in community issues. These activities comprised an anti-underage drinking campaign (the main activity), distributing and reading *La Opinión*, bike riding, community surveys, and cultural events at *Barrio*. Furthermore, Luis always prompted ICLAC students to participate in community events, such as community festivals and cultural events at *Barrio*. As an example, the ICLAC students participated in the door-knocking event to obtain signatures supporting public affordable housing, too. They worked with volunteers, walked around neighborhoods, and talked to residents about where they came from, the cause of HPNSV, and the necessity of public affordable housing in the community. It became a good opportunity for youth to learn more about issues of gentrification and the efforts HPNSV made to address them.

Luis' emphasis on *La Opinión* extended to ICLAC, too. Luis tried to help students understand the importance of *La Opinión* in the community—how it was the most important tool for HPNSV to educate and communicate with people in the face of a mainstream media that mostly covered only the negative aspects of the community. He strongly encouraged students to contribute to *La Opinión*, so that the voice of the youth could be heard throughout the community. To this end, students in the journalism class wrote articles about their anti-underage drinking campaign. Students regularly circulated *La Opinión* to the neighborhoods and read articles including the one written by their peers together in the PD class. By so doing, ICLAC gradually drove students to become more engaged in the community and foster critical perspectives on the issues that affected their lives.

*Keeping close connections to Barrio: Sustaining the community leadership pipeline for the next generation.* *Barrio* was a springboard to an unconventional political space and community activism among youth. As HPNSV had origins in *Barrio*, Luis, who himself also grew into an activist through *Barrio*, always stressed the importance of connecting ICLAC to *Barrio* in order to continue *Barrio*'s legacy. In the PD class, students discussed how to intertwine *Barrio* and ICLAC. They talked about the meaning of the core rules of *Barrio*, such as youth ownership, no homophobia, no sexism, and no racism. In addition, most classes in ICLAC, including the PD class, took place at *Barrio*, which might have helped the ICLAC students to become more familiar with *Barrio*. The students were also asked to organize cultural events at *Barrio* on their own, from which they could learn organizing skills including leadership, collaboration, and peer-support. These were aimed at allowing the ICLAC students to experience what *Barrio* could be for youth and to recognize that they could be a part of it.

Some ICLAC students performed poetry and hip-hop music at *Barrio*'s Friday events. Youth came from other neighborhoods to see their friends' performances, or to perform themselves. Sometimes, the older generation of *Barrio*, who had become community leaders, including Luis himself, performed together with the new generation at *Barrio*.

There were several youth leaders at *Barrio*, known as the collective. The youth leaders played a key role in helping the ICLAC students become immersed in *Barrio* and the community. Megan was one of the *Barrio* collective and also a new coordinator of ICLAC. She said that when she was young, she harbored a lot of anger and negative emotions related to family issues, having lost her brother to gang violence, and having been involved in drug dealing in order to buy food for her younger sister. While she also had a hard time in school,

one of Megan's high school teachers had discovered her great talent for poetry. Little by little, Megan learned to sublimate the negative emotions rooted in her tough personal life into an art, which brought her praise and acknowledgement. This changed her life, leading her to successfully graduate from high school, go on to college, and in time become one of the leaders at *Barrio*. She also actively participated in other community work including HPNSV, emerging as another young role model for youth and an agent for change in the community. Because Megan went through and overcame many struggles that many of the ICLAC students also faced, her presence in *Barrio* and ICLAC was promising to other youth. There were several other youth leaders at *Barrio* like Megan who could help the ICLAC students connect to *Barrio* and its community engagement.

The variety of ways in which Luis got the local teens involved in the community represented holistic and intergenerational civic learning. This contributed to producing active members of the community and sustaining the community leadership pipeline for the next generation. I believe this is a good example of what education for critical and engaged citizenship should be about, which has long been lost in institutionalized civic learning. Interestingly, however, Luis never used the term "citizen" in his PD class. Instead, he used the terms "*Borinqueño*" or "*boricua*," which means "Puerto Rican" in *Taíno* language, the indigenous language of the island. This is another important finding of this research: an absence of a language of citizenship, which I further discuss in the next section.

## Discussion

I want to emphasize that the distinction between the four domains— political, anti-gentrification, cultural-social, and educational—is not the focus of this study. Indeed, HPNSV did not categorize their works as such; the four domains are intertwined with each other in practice. In the long run, HPNSV's myriad community projects aimed to resist gentrification and build their own unique model of participatory democracy at the local level. HPNSV's wide range of efforts to get people of all ages to engage in the community essentially embedded civic learning into their everyday lives. Here, I further discuss the importance of the community work of HPNSV regarding the ecological approach to civic learning and the absence of language of citizenship in their community work.

**An ecological approach to education for critical and engaged citizenship for everyone.** The community work of HPNSV was constructed based on a mixture of the collective Puerto Rican diasporic identity, deep-rooted racism, economic inequity, and a long tradition of vibrant community engagement. The PRCC, the umbrella organization of HPNSV, had long worked hard to meet the various needs of the community people, based on the philosophy of self-determination, self-reliance, and self-actualization, which they captured in the simple phrase: "Live and help them live." Such long-term commitment contributed to the development of the Huntington Park community and also made the Huntington Park community known as one of the most famous Puerto Rican communities across the nation. In this context, HPNSV did not merely fight gentrification, but effectively organized to build a model of participatory democracy that suited the unique context of Huntington Park. Karla, one of the key HPNSV activists, talked about this:

Whether it's electoral politics, whether it's a parade down the street, whether it's *La Opinión*, whether it's a housing seminar, whether it's an afterschool program—it all ultimately is to help to keep the community residents here and give them resources that they need to make the community better.

Hence, HPNSV was involved in a wide range of community work, and through *La Opinión*, HPNSV communicated the efforts of the PRCC for the community. HPNSV activists wanted the people of the community to see gentrification from the broader

perspective of long-term community development. The activists concerned themselves with vigorous educational practice to help people understand what “*Boricua*” living in Huntington Park was meant to be. They wanted people to keep their pride as Puerto Ricans and know the numerous brilliant achievements that the PRCC made for the community, while being aware of the many forms of social injustice imposed particularly on communities of color. The activists most of all tried to encourage people to take part in collective efforts to preserve their cultural territory and develop the community.

HPNSV activists always highlighted the importance of building relationships with community residents. They wanted their movement to be embedded in people’s everyday lives based on long-term relationships, rather than be a simple one-time mobilization. Their wide range of community work entailed the creation of unique civic spaces, networks, support systems, and cultural traditions in the community. People were able to interact with one another, be informed of what was happening in the community, and take part in making a difference. This constituted informal and critical civic learning in the everyday lives of all people, a process that Longo (2007) refers to as the “ecology of civic learning.” Also remarkable is that HPNSV, chiefly through Luis, ICLAC, and *Barrio*, actively included youth in this community engagement project for the purpose of producing active members of the community and sustaining the pipeline of community leadership for the next generation. Luis made consistent efforts to involve local youth in community events and issues, and to pass over the legacy of community activism to the next generation. These features form a good illustration of civic education embedded in everyday lives.

**The absence of a language of citizenship.** Interestingly enough, the term “citizen” was rarely used in association with the community work of HPNSV. The participants never voluntarily used the term “citizenship” in interviews before I brought it up. I found this to be an interesting gap in language use, which I had not anticipated before doing my fieldwork. Instead of the term “citizenship,” participants used the term “*Boricua*” or “*Borinqueno*” to highlight their Puerto Rican identity regarding their community work. “I’d never use the language “citizenship” (laugh) describing anything. . . . We don’t even use the language of citizenship because the realization of citizenship is not the objective,” Richard said. He added, “[Citizenship is] so associated with American-ness. And when people talk about American, they really mean white.” Other participants voiced similar opinions. Luis, too, saw himself as a second-class or third-class citizen of the U.S., despite the fact that as a Puerto Rican he was technically a U.S. citizen.

Puerto Rico’s ambiguous political status—neither a state nor an independent nation-state—was an important backdrop for understanding the work of HPNSV and their attitude towards citizenship. While Puerto Rico is officially a commonwealth of the U.S., many people in HPNSV/PRCC saw Puerto Rico as an internal colony of United States and had historically supported the nationalist platform of independence for Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans had been collectively made U.S. citizens by the Jones Act of 1917, but even then, native-born Puerto Ricans were not granted the constitutional rights of U.S. citizenship, according to *Downes v. Bidwell*, which declared that Puerto Rico was “a territory appurtenant and belonging to the United States, but not a part of the United States within the revenue clauses of the Constitution” (Perez, 2008, p. 1037). Such an ambiguous political status led to an inferior citizenship status for Puerto Ricans, in which those on the island pay no federal taxes and are not allowed to vote in U.S. presidential elections. Elias, the executive director of the PRCC, outlined two meanings of citizenship to Puerto Ricans: “One, you can be drafted to the U.S. Army, and two, you can travel to the U.S. without a paper. That’s it!” He added, “This is a colony. They [the U.S. government] don’t go as far as saying, ‘This is our colony.’ But they say, ‘Puerto Rico belongs to, but not a part of [the U.S.]. Something belongs to you, it means a colonial possession.’”

What HPNSV activists were opposed to was not citizenship per se, but rather white privilege, racism, individualism, and U.S. colonialism linked to citizenship. Elias viewed citizenship in terms of universal human rights, as opposed to citizenship framed by the contours of the nation-state or the U.S. constitution. His perspective had something in common with the critique of the restricted notion of citizenship in the modern liberal tradition. He said, “If you define citizenship as something defined exclusively by a state, by a constitution, that’s quite problematic. At the end of the day, all people have basic human rights. Citizenship must be about a whole person.” His philosophy of citizenship was embodied by three major concepts—self-actualization, self-reliance, and self-determination—drawing upon Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy. Importantly, Elias’s three “self-” concepts connoted collectivism, not individualism, in the context of the community. He said, “We are talking about the context of community being self-reliant. The community will have the means at its disposal to be able to realize itself as a full people. That means the right of self-actualization and ultimately, the right of self-realization.”

Although HPNSV activists did not favor the term “citizenship,” their community work demonstrated the realization of such ideals in the community, which is the essence of what I call “citizenship as praxis.” Their community work is in itself fundamentally concerned with civic teaching, learning about the meanings of being “*Boricua*” living in Huntington Park and the various desirable ways of doing so. It is notable that HPNSV activists and their colleagues in the community never wanted to be insular locals confined within Huntington Park. Rather, they actively interacted with diverse groups of people in the larger society to address community issues. They were aware that gentrification is a global phenomenon that is taking place almost everywhere in the world and is related to the larger structural problems rooted in racism and an unjust economic order. In order to address such issues, HPNSV activists developed their own local strategies that best suited their social and political contexts, and they were open to collaborating with others who faced similar issues.

After having conversations with me about the different perceptions of citizenship, the HPNSV activists tried to connect their civic practice with the idea of citizenship as praxis, rather than simply status. Although they still felt awkward about it, they all agreed upon the importance of community engagement as a primary responsibility associated with being a member of a particular society. Quinn said:

What type of citizen are you? Are you a citizen [who] just sits back just assisting what they are? Or a citizen who feels compelled to act on the realities and tries to improve it and make it better realities for themselves and future generations? You can't just sit down and complain about it. You have to actively work toward changing it. [It] all starts at the very small level, eventually to change things around you.

I believe one of the most crucial steps towards developing education for active citizenship is to recognize the significance of community activism. Community activism offers vital examples of how people can create situated and diverse forms of civic practice to make social change, whilst the prevailing notion of citizenship is too restricted to account for such civic practices and social criticism. I suggest that more attention be given to investigating what citizenship really means in the context of ordinary civic lives, with regards not only to community activism but also to other grassroots movements. Moreover, further effort should be made to think about practical ways to possibly integrate these lessons into current citizenship education.

In an interview, Richard raised provoking questions: “How would this [accepting the notion of citizenship as praxis] be different to us? How would it impact our work and practices that we performed here?” I have yet to come up with a satisfying answer. These questions are another indicator of his reluctance to use the term “citizenship,” but at the same

time, they are a good starting point for researchers and educators to further inquire into how to create a consensus for the use of the same language between different groups, so that all can band together to re-envision what education for engaged and critical citizenship ought to be like.

## Conclusion

This paper explores an unconventional notion of citizenship, or citizenship as praxis, regarding community activism among minority young people. My research question was: What particular sense of citizenship is being constructed surrounding the “¡Huntington Park NO SE VENDE!” (HPNSV) Campaign in Huntington Park at Chicago? It is not easy to give a simple answer to this question. Technically, the answer could be, “No sense of citizenship was found,” because the term “citizenship” was not associated with the community work of HPNSV. Nevertheless, it cannot be overemphasized that what HPNSV activists were opposed to was white privilege, U.S. colonialism, racism, economic injustice, and the individualism associated with U.S. citizenship, not citizenship per se. From my perspective, HPNSV vigorously engaged in praxis-based citizenship to create situated and diverse forms of civic practice: HPNSV (and the community) were earnestly concerned with what it meant to be “*Boricua*” living in Huntington Park, and what the desirable ways of doing so were. Above all, HPNSV was an overt collective resistance to social prejudice and oppression imposed on the people of the community. Also, their wide range of community work—creating their own local information system, enthusiastically participating in an electoral campaign, and reaffirming Puerto Rican identity through cultural events and rituals—contributed in different ways to educating community people of all ages for the purpose of building a unique model of grassroots democracy. Having naturally involved holistic and intergenerational civic learning, the work of HPNSV was important especially in their efforts regarding local youth, in which the youth were encouraged to actively participate in the community and become critical and engaged “*boricuas*.” I believe as educators and researchers we should make a greater effort to integrate these rich civic lessons into the body of citizenship education.

I do not argue that praxis-based citizenship renounces modern liberal citizenship, which I earlier defined in this paper as an institutionalized form and legal status within a governmental authority. The two modes of citizenship—praxis-based citizenship and modern liberal citizenship (Tully, 2008)—are conceptually distinct, but in reality they overlap with each other. The point of this study is to restore the praxis-based citizenship that has long been missing in the discourse of citizenship. Whereas community activism is often classified as radical, unconventional, and inappropriate for the classroom, questioning who defines what is radical and why would be the starting point for embracing the integral civic lessons of community activism and eventually revolutionizing citizenship education. This study is one of the first steps towards achieving such a purpose, broadening the boundaries of citizenship education.

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