CIVIC DUTY: YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONCEPTIONS OF VOTING AS A MEANS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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Many citizens have disengaged from participation in civic life with a resulting call for new initiatives in civic education. Many of these programs have had little research on citizens' prior conceptions of participation. In this article, we provide a map of the conceptions of civic participation, specifically voting, held by two groups: recent African immigrants to Canada and native-born Canadians. Youth understand voting as a key element of democratic governance, a hard won democratic right, and a duty of democratic citizenship yet most indicate they do not plan to vote because voting does not make a difference.

Key words: democratic engagement, political disengagement, democratic involvement, civic education

Bien des gens renoncent à participer à la vie publique, d'où l'importance de nouvelles initiatives dans le domaine de l'éducation à la citoyenneté. Or, un grand nombre de programmes en la matière ne tiennent pas compte, faute de s'appuyer sur des recherches rigoureuses, des idées que se font au départ les citoyens au sujet d'une telle participation. Dans cet article, les auteurs font le point sur diverses conceptions de la participation à la vie publique, notamment le vote, au sein de deux groupes : des Africains qui ont récemment immigré au Canada et des Canadiens de souche. Les jeunes considèrent le vote comme un élément clé de la gouvernance démocratique, un droit démocratique durement obtenu et l'un des devoirs d'un citoyen en démocratie, mais la plupart signalent qu'ils n'ont pas l'intention de voter parce que leur vote ne change rien.

Mots clés : participation à la démocratie, désengagement politique, éducation à la citoyenneté

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The disengagement of citizens from civic and political processes is of great concern to academics and policy makers around the world (Stolle & Hooghe, 2004). A particular focus of this concern has been young people who have been described in some jurisdictions as exhibiting a "civic deficit" (Civics Expert Group, 1994, p. 132) and a "potentially explosive alienation" from civic life (Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998, p. 16). Reporting on case studies of civic education policy from around the world, Torney-Purta, Schwille, and Amadeo (1999) suggest "that countries find themselves with increasing numbers of adolescents who are disengaged from the political system" (p. 14).

A key indicator of this retreat from civic participation is drastically declining voting rates among young people. In Canada, for example, voter turn out hit a record low of 60.5 per cent during the 2004 federal election with only 22 per cent of eligible 18-22 year-olds turning out to cast their ballots (Centre for Research and Information on Canada, 2004; Cook, 2004). This significant retreat from a key aspect of representative democracy has fuelled both public and academic speculation and a renewed interest in political socialization research.

In 2002 the Political Science Department at McGill University sponsored a workshop that brought together political scientists and educators from Canada and the United States to discuss issues related to youth disengagement. A similar conference, "Canadian Democracy: Bringing Youth Back into the Process," was held in the fall of 2004 (Centre for Research and Information on Canada, 2004). As well, the Canadian Election Study, a major national research initiative, has focused considerable attention on youth voting patterns (Gidengil, Nevitte, Blais, Fournier, & Everitt, 2004).

This sense of crisis around civic disengagement is a key factor driving program development and reform in citizenship education around the world (see, for example, Sears & Hughes, 2005; Sears & Hyslop-Margison, 2006). In Canada there are calls to "[sell] voter participation to young people" (O'Neill, 2004, p. 2) through enhanced civic education programs in schools. One result of educational reform as a response to this kind of crisis is a rush to implement programs without adequate knowledge of what the problems really are and what policies or programs will effectively address the phenomenon of low youth voter

turnout. Examples include calls to lower youth voting age to 16 (Milner, 2005) and the development of new high-school civics courses in Ontario and British Columbia. Although such reforms might alleviate youth disengagement, no systematic evidence suggests that they will, and some indicate they will not. In regard to the latter, both the new high-school programs in Ontario and British Columbia focus extensively on civic engagement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005; Ministry of Education, 2005). However, as Torney-Purta and Vermeer (2004) write, high school may be too late for such programs. "A variety of studies of elementary and middle school students, including the IEA Civic Education Study, shows that in democratic countries the average student is already a member of his or her political culture by age 14" (p. 23).

The past several years have seen a growing body of research about the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of young people with regard to citizenship (see, for example Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Husfeldt, & Nikolova, 2002; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), but understanding in these areas is still very limited . One particular area of research where civic education lags far behind science and math, for example, is in developing a body of work about students' prior knowledge of ideas and concepts important to citizenship. Constructivists argue that good teaching is at least partly premised on attention to the conceptions/misconceptions people bring to any learning situation (Windschitl, 2002). To be effective, civic education programs have to be developed with some attention to the conceptions students already have of important civic ideas. To that end, we report on youth conceptions of voting, and present a preliminary map of the way a group of recent African immigrant youth to Canada and a group of native-born Canadian youth understand the idea of civic participation.[1]

PRIOR KNOWLEDGE AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

This research is rooted in a constructivist approach to teaching and learning with the basic premise that learners come to any learning situation with well-organized prior knowledge, often called schema. These schema may contain misconceptions or naïve theories (Byrnes & Torney-Purta, 1995), are persistent and resistant to change, and always act as powerful filters for and shapers of new knowledge. A significant

body of research demonstrates that prior knowledge is a key factor influencing learning. Ausubel (1968) and Hartman (1991) point out that meaningful new learning depends on organizing material to connect it with the ideas in a learner's cognitive structures. In other words, how we think influences how and what we learn.

Understanding students' prior knowledge is essential to good teaching and new learning. Hunt and Minstrell (1996) argue that difficulties in learning occur when prior knowledge is not taken into account, creating communication barriers between students and teachers. Learners suffer internal conflict if they are taught new material that contradicts their previous understanding.

Social educators have been slow to build a body of information about how children and young people understand the social and political world. History educators have made a significant start at building a substantial knowledge base for how students understand historical ideas and processes (see, for example, Seixas, 2004), but outside of this work, little has been done to map how children and young people understand the social world in general and democratic citizenship in particular.

Considerable research demonstrates that voting rates among young people are declining well beyond life cycle fluctuations. Most of this work consists of large-scale surveys that do not "provide details about the reasons that lie behind the answers given to survey questions, or allow respondents to use their own words to describe their vision of the community and their place within it" (Bishop & Low, 2004, p. 6).

THE STUDY

Forty participants from the Maritime Provinces participated in the study: twenty African immigrants and twenty native-born white and black Canadians. Equal numbers of males and females were included in the study population. All were interviewed in depth to explore their understandings of democratic participation. We could find no previous literature on prior knowledge of key aspects of democracy. The work that does exist focuses not on knowledge but rather on attitudes toward democracy and democratic participation (see, for example, Stolle & Hooghe, 2004). This article gives particular attention to the 20 (10 native-

born Canadians and 10 recent African immigrants) youth participants' conceptions of voting. We have written more extensively elsewhere about other aspects of the findings (Chareka, 2005; Chareka & Sears, 2005).

Because we were interested in uncovering participants' conceptions of a particular phenomenon, we employed a phenomenographic approach to the research (Marton, 1981). Phenomenography is "an empirically based approach that aims to identify the qualitatively different ways in which different people experience, conceptualize, perceive and understand various kinds of phenomena" (Marton, as cited in Richardson, 1999, p. 53).

Phenomenographic interviews are often focused on semi-projective stimuli designed to provoke the interviewee into speaking about the concept under study (Webb, 1997). In this case, stimuli consisted of sets of pictures culled from popular media depicting various kinds of civic participation ranging from community-based activities such as volunteering in a food bank through more public actions such as signing petitions or participating in demonstrations to formal political activities such as voting and running for office. We made an effort to include a range of visibly diverse people in the stimuli but it proved difficult to find pictures of African-Canadians, particularly in activities related to formal politics. Rather than construct stimuli showing such involvement, we felt it better to represent the world as it actually appeared in the media.

Chareka, a recent immigrant from Zimbabwe, conducted the interviews. Each one began with participants choosing one from the range of pictures and a conversation ensued exploring the reasons for selecting that particular picture or set of pictures as opposed to others. Marton, Hounsell, and Entwistle (1984) argue that phenomenographic interviews should follow from participants' comments and "should not have too many questions made up in advance" (p. 270). Chareka followed these procedures allowing interviewees to set the direction for their interviews.

The interviews were taped and transcribed and phenomenographic data analysis was carried out. The first step of the analysis was to identify utterances, defined as a portion of a sentence that describes the

phenomenon under study. Dale (1976) defines an utterance as "a verbal manifestation that conveys a meaning or evidence of understanding" (p. 7). In this study, an utterance was any word or phrase within a sentence related to, or reflecting an understanding of, civic participation. Repeating or recurring points of view or ideas were identified in the utterances and these were clustered and classified into categories of description. These categories of description became the basis for describing the qualitatively different conceptions of political participation that participants held.

FINDINGS

All the interviewees viewed civic participation as important in a democracy, participated in some way, and planned to continue involvement in the future. With some variation in intensity, all participants shied away from formal political involvement – joining political parties or running for office – and said they preferred non-formal, community-based activities. Youth participants understood voting as a key element of democratic governance, a hard-won right, and a duty of democratic citizenship. However, most indicated they did not vote or would not vote in the future when they became eligible.

Voting As a Key Element of Democratic Governance

Young participants clearly understood voting as a vehicle for realizing the democratic idea of the consent of the governed. As one young person, John (C1) (pseudonyms are used for both Canadians - C1,2,3 … and Africans -A1,2,3…) said, "democracy is just being able to say and share your political views without fear of being beaten or harmed, it is being able to choose who's going to be the leader of the country." Angellar (A1) echoed this saying, "voting is to choose leaders you want in a democratic way."

Most youth saw choosing leaders as a possible way to change the direction of the country.

If you want changes you vote for the party that maybe can promote the changes but the significance [of voting] is also for a change and not having the same person over and over, to have a change in the people who lead your country. (Todd, C2)

Beyond choosing leaders, youth recognized voting as both a process for selecting someone to represent them and, related to that, as a means for having a voice.

I'd vote so that a person whose policies I agree with would be in power, because if I didn't vote then someone else that I might not like or agree with what they think might be in power instead. So every vote counts I think. (Lorraine, A2)

Mary (C3), who echoed the sense that like-minded representatives are important, said voting was important, "to get what you want in your community." Although not expressed quite so personally— "get what you want"—the concept of voting as an exercise of citizen power and a way to have a say permeated most of the transcripts.

Henry Milner (2005) worries about young citizens' lack of "the basic knowledge and skills" (p. 1) to make informed choices, but our findings indicate that the youth involved in this study understand both the centrality of voting in liberal democratic practice as well as its implications for selecting leadership and reflecting the views of the people. They also understand key aspects of historical struggles to win and preserve this right.

Voting As a Hard-Won Right

The idea of voting as an important and often hard won-right ran through youth participants' transcripts. In responding to pictures on voting and running for office, James (C4) said, "These pictures actually represent democratic rights, in a democratic society," and Anna (A3) held, "it's people expressing their rights." Most of the youths' responses included the theme that voting, along with other democratic rights, had not come easily but was secured through struggle.

Several youth spoke of historical struggles for democracy, particularly the two world wars. For example, Eric (C5) said,

We have our right to vote because we have gone through a lot in the 20th century, like World War II. I think that it's important, and I am somewhat irritated when people choose not to vote. Because, well, that's the reason we had to go to war and things like that long ago, so as that we could have the right to

decide how our country is run and it's our duty. I think it just makes what people did long ago in vain if we don't take our liberty seriously. (Eric C5)

Participants expressed the idea that democratic rights, including voting, are the result of struggle and sacrifice; they also understood that because these rights are not equally available around the world, they should be appreciated – and exercised – all the more. Grace (A4) pointed out that people immigrate to Canada explicitly to gain democratic rights and, in light of that, wondered why some would not vote. She asked, "If you don't vote, what are you saying to the rest of the world?" She was the only African female youth who said she intended to vote in the future. There was a clear view among the youth that voting was one of a number of important and contested democratic rights.

Voting As a Duty or Obligation

Flowing from both the idea that voting is a key aspect of democratic governance and a hard-won right was the commonly expressed view that it ought to be regarded as a duty. In fact the concept of obligation pervaded the study; all the youth participants described democratic participation in society as a duty and expressed a sense of obligation to engage in some forms of it. This theme emerged particularly when people were responding to pictures on voting. Eric (C5) said that all citizens should participate in voting and "it should be an obligation that comes from within." Grace (A4) echoed this sentiment saying, "I am a very opinionated person and I think people must vote. I think if you don't vote, then you don't have the right to an opinion. You just have to vote, it's your duty." Although most youth saw voting as a basic duty of democratic citizenship more than half said they had not voted in the past and did not intend to vote in the future. The sense of duty was not enough for most of the youth to think about participating in voting.

Ambivalence About Voting

Although many youth understood voting as a key element of a democratic state, a hard-won right, and as a duty in a democratic society, 11 of 20 said they did not intend to vote in the future as shown in Table 1.

The following exchange with Debbie (A5) is typical.

Interviewer: What is the significance of voting?

Debbie: The significance of voting is that people get to decide whom they want. They can choose a person who they feel can represent them and air their views for them.

Interviewer: If given the chance to vote, would you vote?

Debbie: No, It's just something that I don't have an interest in. I do realize that it is necessary because it means that I'm having someone else do the work for me and I am not doing anything, but I don't think I would actually take the time to go and vote. I don't trust politicians. You know, when people are campaigning they spice things up a bit. I don't find interest in voting because the person representing me doesn't do a good job.

Table 1: Youth Voting Practice and Intention

Gender and Age	Have participated or intend to participate in voting	Have not voted and intend not vote in the future
Youth male Canadians	2	2
Youth female Canadians	2	4
Youth male African immigrants	4	0
Youth female African immigrants	1	5
Total	9	11

Although Debbie (A5) expressed a sense of apathy about voting, she said, "It's just something I don't have an interest in." For most youth, the choice not to vote was not about apathy but perceived effectiveness. Having an immediate impact and making a noticeable difference were key factors for youth in choosing the ways in which they would

participate. Comments like, "I necessarily participate in these activities to make a difference in my community and the world at large," showed up throughout transcripts. Most of the youth did not see voting as a way of making a difference. As Todd C2 said, "A lot of people my age who are politically involved choose not to vote because they see it as a waste of time and that they can't effect any change." There were several reasons why these young people felt voting was an unproductive way to have a voice and make change including the perceptions that individual MPs or MLAs are largely ineffective, that there is little real difference among political parties, and that politicians can not be trusted.

Ineffective Representatives, Undifferentiated Parties, and Corrupt Politicians

There was fairly wide consensus among young participants that because backbench MPs and MLAs had little or no real influence on policy, they saw no point in worrying about which ones were sent to parliament.

Todd (C2): We elect people and every four or five years we re-elect people but we don't have very much voice when they're in office.
Interviewer: What do you mean you don't have much voice?
Todd: Well, the people that are elected sort of if they're not cabinet ministers, they don't have much say. And cabinet ministers just go in to head the civil service who is just marching along, you know, doing their thing. And the cabinet ministers that are head of this particular ministry just keep changing. Every four years they have to be trained. This slows down the process, and the people who are backbenchers don't have much say at all, in the direction. And they're the ones that represent us. I think there could be a better system… but we don't know what it is. (Todd, C2)

A related reason for not voting was a perceived lack of difference between the dominant political parties in Canada and the feeling it is next to impossible to elect real alternatives to them.

The people that I know who are politically active and choose not to vote usually do so because they feel that there is very little option. They feel that there is very little difference between say the Progressive Conservative party and the Liberal party, and don't feel that their voice would make any difference because these two different groups of power are going to maintain their hegemony regardless. (Eric, C5)

No, it isn't that I don't care. It's, well, like it doesn't matter because parties are almost the same. I guess I don't think that it would really matter, as long as there's someone because the parties are almost the same. (Adam , A7)

Finally, a strong current of cynicism toward and distrust of politicians ran through the transcripts. One female African immigrant, Debbie (A5), said she did not intend to vote because in her view candidates tended to "spice things up a bit" during campaigns just to get elected.

The way I look at it is that like when they're campaigning they can be like, oh you know, vote for me and I'll do this… and this and that… and I'll help education … and I… you know, I'll get funds … like they make it seem like they'll do so much when really in a way in the back of my mind I think that they won't be able to do that. (Debbie, A5).

Youth who were inclined not to vote in the future peppered their responses with similar comments saying things like, "I don't trust politicians," or indicating that politicians are primarily motivated by self interest.

I have like these past experiences with politicians, they always say they are going to do so and so for you and so when you vote for them they don't do it. So anyone you vote for they promise something and they will not do it. They will not even look at you when they have the power at that time. So that makes me want not to vote for anyone … I don't trust them; I don't want to know anything or to vote. (Anna, A3)

Even those youth who did vote or intended to vote in the future understood the choice made by their peers. Eric (C5), who recognized that many of his peers chose not to vote because they saw it as ineffective, said, "I feel very similar to them in a lot of ways but I still choose to vote because I know that I can still have some sort of say."

As is evident from the excerpts above, a high degree of consensus occurred across the youths' transcripts in terms of how voting was conceptualized, in attitudes toward it, and in intentions to participate in the future.

DISCUSSION

Both theoretical literature and empirical research on political participation have raised concerns about a decline in voting patterns especially among youth (Cook, 2004; Howe & Northrup, 2000; Pammett, 2001). This concern has contributed to apprehension about youth disengagement from civic life more generally. Although our work supports findings that indicate a widespread and growing disinterest in voting among youth, it does not support fears about general youth ignorance or disengagement, just the opposite in fact.

For the most part, participants in this study exhibited a fairly sophisticated understanding of voting and its place in the political system. They knew the role voting plays in democratic governance and had a fairly well-developed sense of its evolution as a democratic right. This knowledge extended, ironically, to a sense of the crisis over declining voting rates among youth. Todd (C2) said, "In Canada 40 per cent of people don't vote. In my age range I think it's more like 70 per cent don't vote and it's kind of sad." Eric (C5) said, "I realize from the history of voting that voting rates are going down and also for young people." These young people know a fair bit about the nature, history, and purposes of the franchise but many are not convinced to exercise it.

In terms of engagement, all African and Canadian participants in our study were involved in some non-formal forms of civic activity, intended to continue and, in many cases, increase their involvement (Chareka, 2005). They do, however, expect tangible results for their participation and are not inclined to forms of participation that do not offer these, and many see voting as ineffective at producing such concrete outcomes.

These findings are consistent with work in Britain of the British Electoral Commission (2002) which found that most youth do not vote because they feel it has little or no impact. Even similar studies done in the United States also show that young people participate in many civic activities as activists. Carpini (2003) argues, "youth are very much concerned about public life and contribute to it. But they believe politics is not the most effective way for them to do it" (p. 5). They understand the right to vote is a hard won democratic right; they just do not see it as worth the effort in present circumstances. In terms of understating voting, there was little if any discrepancy between African youth and

their Canadian peers. We found this level of congruency among youth quite striking

Our results have implications both for the reform of democratic structures and citizenship education. In the case of the former, it needs to be recognized that in many cases the problems do not lie with youth themselves. They feel the political system offers little real choice, is unresponsive to their concerns, and ordinary politicians have very little real power to effect change. They are not alone. Buckingham (1999), for example, believes that young people have good reason to be alienated from a system that does not take their involvement seriously. The Centre for Research and Information on Canada (2001) suggests that structural factors such as Liberal Party hegemony, the permanent voters list, and the "First Past the Post" electoral system might all contribute to young voter disaffection in this country. The Centre argues, as we do, that young people are no less alienated than their parents, but in the absence of political commitment are less likely to vote out of a sense of duty. As Osborne (2001) points out, "the democratic deficit is the symptom of a structural problem that cannot be fixed through better citizenship education, but only through changes in the political system" (p. 38). A number of Canadian provinces, for example New Brunswick, British Columbia, and Ontario, have launched commissions to initiate just such reform of the electoral system. These commissions would do well by taking into account the conceptions of young people about current civic structures in developing their recommendations for reform.

The second front for action ought to be civic education. The disengagement of youth from formal political participation has led to calls to lower the voting age to 16 and for enhanced civic education, particularly voter education programs (see, for example, Centre for Research and Information on Canada, 2004; Cook, 2004). Many current and proposed programs focus on re-engaging young citizens with the processes and institutions of representative democracy but not many, in our experience, address expanding students' conceptions of these processes.

Social studies curricula across Canada, where citizenship education most explicitly takes place, are rooted in constructivist approaches to teaching and learning. This is expressed most overtly in Québec.

Many aspects of the Québec Education Program, particularly those related to the development of competencies and the mastery of complex knowledge, call for practices that are based on the constructivist approach to learning. This approach sees learning as a process and the student as the principal agent in that process. (Gouvernment du Québec, 2001, p. 5).

In all jurisdictions, good teaching and learning are described, among other things, as collaborative, issues-based, interactive, and participatory and students are described as being engaged in an "active process of constructing meaning" (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, n.d., p. 30). As discussed earlier, a key component of constructivist approaches to teaching and learning is attention to prior knowledge. Constructivists hold that students come to any learning situation not as blank slates but with a range of prior knowledge and experience that is critical in shaping how they respond to new learning. Given the commitment to constructivist approaches across Canada, it seems to us curricular and program reform must consider the understanding students bring to the classroom and their learning situations.

Although our study offers no evidence of specific programs and activities to best take into account the conceptions of voting held by the youth who participated, we can imply some general directions. First, it seems clear to us that programs focused on either teaching the technical aspects of voting or, indeed, the reasons why voting is important in a democracy may be missing the mark because the youth we interviewed had clear and well-developed understandings of both those areas. Voter education, to be effective, will have to be several steps removed from voting itself and deal with young people's conceptions of politicians as ineffective and dishonest, and political parties as all the same.

Research in several areas of education has demonstrated that prior conceptions are persistent. In other words, people are reluctant to change their minds (see, for example, Hughes & Sears, 2004). A key component of helping students construct these new meanings is to provide learning opportunities that create cognitive dissonance. In other words, openness to new understandings flows directly from situations and encounters that make students uncomfortable or dissatisfied with their current ways of thinking. In the words of one Québec policy document, "Situations that are seen as most conducive to learning are those that present a real

challenge to students by causing them to reexamine their learnings and personal representations" (Gouverment du Québec, 2001, p. 5). Citizenship education programs should include material that will cause students to rethink their conceptions of the political process.

The view that backbench MPs and MLAs have little real power, for example, may be partly true. Parliamentarians have made repeated calls to address this issue. But, it seems to us, it is also an oversimplification. Part of the problem may be that civic education programs focus on the macro work of parliament with little attention to the areas where individual politicians make significant contributions: committee and constituency work are two that come to mind. Similarly, although lack of differentiation among mainstream political parties may be partly true, it is not the whole story. There are real differences across the Canadian political spectrum. It seems to us effective voter education will have to engage students' naive conceptions in these areas through presenting situations that challenge their understandings and by fostering wide ranging dialogue both within classrooms and beyond (Hughes & Sears, 2004). Finally, young people have to see examples of how voting can be an effective expression of their voice—a criteria for participation that permeated our data.

CONCLUSION

In the literature on prior knowledge, authors use terms like alternative frameworks, misconceptions, and naive theories to refer to the conceptions students bring with them to learning situations. Recent work on young children's understandings of shelter and food, for example, portrays spotty and tacit knowledge, characterized by misconceptions and relatively low levels of sophistication (Brophy, Alleman, & O'Mahony, 2003). The authors of that work argue that, "…discovering valid prior knowledge that instruction can connect with and build upon is fundamental to effective teaching" (Brophy & Alleman, 2002, p. 461). The point is not so much to change students' thinking as to shape, extend, and contextualize it. In our view, sophisticated understandings of concepts and ideas include knowledge of how they have been and are understood across time and contexts.

The study reported here demonstrates that both the native-born Canadians and African immigrant youth who participated see voting as an ineffective means of civic engagement and have largely decided to opt out of it. Civic education policies and programs seeking to have students take a second look at voting will have to begin by getting students to explicitly examine the ideas they bring with them to class, and then engage them in interpersonal dialogue with others (either directly or through readings, film) whose conceptions are different. Politicians can help by taking young people, even those too young to vote, seriously and working with them to address the issues they have about the political system. In this way students' ideas can be challenged, extended, and seen in a broader context. In short, effective voter education will have to extend well beyond attention to the mechanics and purposes of voting itself. Youth, for the most part, know those answers already and are not convinced.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NOTES

[1] The study reported here is part of a larger study designed to describe conceptions of democratic participation among African immigrants in comparison to those held by native-born Canadians. In the larger study important differences were identified in conceptions of democratic participation between African immigrants and native-born Canadians but in terms of understating voting there was little if any discrepancy between African youth and their Canadian peers. We found this level of congruency among youth quite striking (Chareka, 2005).

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