



Children of Immigrants, Legal Status, and Everyday Civic Work:

Lessons for Citizenship Education

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Active Citizenship or Dreams Deferred?

What happens to a dream deferred?

*Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?*

*Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?*

*Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.*

Or does it explode?

Langston Hughes



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No group has been more visible in immigrant rights than undocumented name DREAMers, evoking both the DREAM Act as well as a sense of the "American Dream," these young people are on the front lines of one of today's most important rights struggles.

In New York, an estimated 90,000 young people are eligible for the DREAM Act. But the New York DREAM Act squashed the hope of college aid for college. More than a decade

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Immigrant children often take serve as interpreters

Some say this role strengthens their cognition; others say it's too much to handle

October 01, 2008 | By Azam Ahmed, TRIBUNE REPORTER



Guiding Frameworks

- Reframing Civic Education → Civic Identity
- Civic Work and Language Brokering
- Youth (Civic) Purpose
 - “a sustained intention to contribute to the world beyond the self through civic or political action” (Malin, Ballard, & Damon, in press).



Research Questions

1. What is the civic work of children from Mexican immigrant families?
2. How does such work relate to the development of purpose as children become adolescents and young adults?
3. What opportunities and challenges do they face in enacting their purpose?



Methods

- Longitudinal qualitative project
 - Three time points: 2000-2003; 2005; 2009-2010
 - 10 case studies
 - Mexican-American language brokers in Chicago area
- Life Story Interviews (McAdams, 1995)
- Constructivist approach to grounded theory (Charmaz, 2010), with “member checking”



Participants

Names	Status	Education	Aspirations (Jobs and Civic)
Abe, 20	US-born	Some college	Court system, increase Hispanic representation
Cici, 30	US-born	Master's	Expand Spanish blog for Latinas, better society for kids
Estela, 18	Undoc	High school	Nurse, to do/be best for baby
Josh, 20	US-born	Some college	Police office, to help the "little people"
Junior, 19	Undoc	High school	Certified auto-body mechanic, reform imm system
Luz, 28	US-born	Bachelor's	Social studies teacher, return for Ph.D.
María, 20	US-born	Bachelor's	Forensic scientist, help family financially
Nova, 20	Legal res	Bachelor's	Graphic designer, make visual translations thru art
Sammy, 23	US-born	Master's	Corporate pilot, to return to Mexican neighborhood
Traci, 22	US-born	Bachelor's	Unsure

Main Findings

1. Language brokering and growing up in an immigrant home created opportunities for adolescents and young adults to do *civic work*.
2. For many, this work led to a particular civic pathway, or *purpose*, related to their immigrant experiences and language brokering.
3. Although all participants engaged in some active citizenship, those without legal status faced serious challenges and *deferred working toward their purpose*.



Josh: Taking Action Toward a Purpose

“Even ‘til now, you know, when she needs me to translate things . . . she goes to me a lot.”

“being bilingual has a big advantage, knowing that I’m probably going to be working in most Hispanic areas.”



Estela: Dreams Deferred

“I was shadowing with the nurse, and the nurse didn’t know Spanish, but the lady didn’t know English. And there was translators there for the lady, but they were busy, so the nurse relied on me to help.”

“Translating . . . seems like a way to helping people. And that’s what I like to do.”



SO what is citizenship?

To me, citizenship is . . . doing your part to make something better. Well, with translating, it was very much like that. You do your part to help make something better. And I think that's always gonna be a part of what I do. . . . Whether I become more involved in religion, or my faith, or politics, or as my kids grow older, things that they're involved with, I will really remember that. You know, I think it really frustrates me when I'm talking to someone and their perspective on something is very narrow, and they only see themselves being affected by something and not how others are affected by it. Because I think to myself, "Well, really, being a translator, you can't think about yourself." You think about your tone of voice, and how your message is coming across to your parents, to the doctor, to the receptionist, to the person on the phone. You're really kind of tip-toeing between these two worlds, right? (Cici)



Implications

- Research: must disrupt static notions of citizenship
- Education: must envision what is possible
- Our work: must recognize the greater politics that shape youths' civic pathways and the roadblocks they face, even with state-level Dream Acts or DACA



Conclusion



Thank you!

Please email [dornerl @ missouri.edu](mailto:dornerl@missouri.edu)
with questions or comments or a copy of the paper.
A copy of this power-point is under Resources @
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GRACIAS!

