Agence de la santé
et des services sociaux
de Montréal
Québec 🟦🟦

How can youth empowerment contribute to building healthy social and physical environments?

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Canadian   Société
Cancer   canadienne
Society   du cancer

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Plan

1   Youth empowerment in theory
    Process vs. Results-driven strategies
2   Youth empowerment in practice with two interventions;
    i.   Montreal Public Health Directorate (ASSS)
          Evidence-based practices
    ii.   Mis au Jeu (Community Organisation - NGO)
          Community-building practices
3   Influence of context
    Funding, organisational conditions, professional practices

Empowerment in theory

- *"Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health."*
- **Strengthen Community Actions**
  - *"Health promotion works through concrete and effective community action in <u>setting priorities, making decisions, planning strategies and implementing them</u> to achieve better health. At the heart of this process is the empowerment of communities - their <u>ownership and control</u> of their own endeavours and destinies."*

Empowerment :
Fostering what kind of relationships?

- Key elements of the empowering relationship
  - Empower as a transitive verb;
    - to bestow power on others
    - But where 'disempowered individuals or groups risk to remain the objects, the recipients of professional action' subjects to whom 'we' empower are incapable of their own powerful actions
  - Empower as an intransitive verb;
    - The act of gaining or assuming power.
    - Entirely reflexive, it takes no object.
    - Power seized by individuals or groups.

Youth empowerment
as a results-driven strategy

- To interest youth to come together in a partnership.
- To identify and agree upon a problematic situation.
- To create a plan that can improve this problem.
- To carry this plan out.

…in a process where decision making is shared…all have a voice…(i.e. democratic)?

…role of health professional from regional public health agency, role of teacher, role of community worker?

Youth empowerment
as a process-driven strategy

- Building critical consciousness (Eyerman & Jamison, 1991) and cognitive praxis (Freire, 1985)
  - Identifying, reflecting, challenging dominant social beliefs and norms, generate new knowledge, create new ways to look at old problems or relations.
  - Individuals reveal and situate their own experiences within the contexts of their lives during group dialogue.
- Revealing distorted communications / false consciousness
  - Revisiting identity through undistorted conceptual lens
    - "the ideas and beliefs that reign or rule are the ideas and beliefs of those that rule or govern" (Jurgen Habermas)
    - Ways of communicating and using language (labels) that maintain processes of social exclusion
      - Youth as unprepared, inexperienced, unable
      - Youth groups as motor-heads, stone-heads, trouble makers

The Programs

Operation Say It Loud!
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Mobilijeunes
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Say It Loud! and *Mobilijeunes*

1   Objectives
2   Foundations
3   Activities / Implementation
4   Influence of context
- Funding
- Organisational conditions
- Professional practices

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Operation Say It Loud!
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Operation Say It Loud!
Objectives

Improve the health of young people

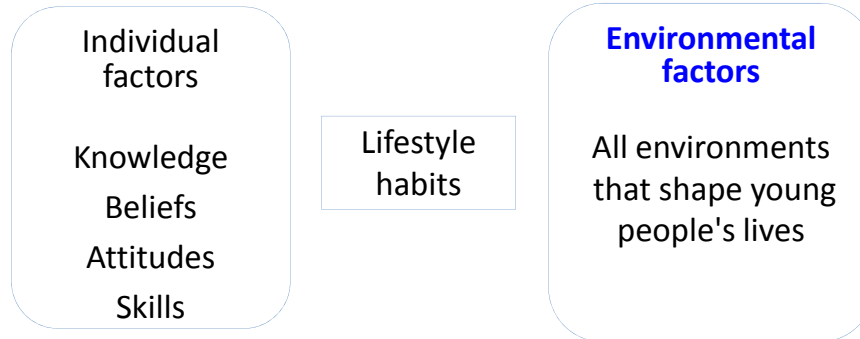Québec Public Health Program
Governmental action plan
↓
Increase the proportion of the population
that adopts healthy lifestyle habits
↓
Reduce the proportion of smokers
Reduce the obesity rate

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Operation Say It Loud!
The Basis

Individual factors

Knowledge
Beliefs
Attitudes
Skills

Lifestyle habits

Environmental factors

All environments that shape young people's lives

Environmental factors influence adoption of healthy behaviours

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Operation Say It Loud!
The Basis

Young people can influence their environment
Youth empowerment is a known factor for school success, health and well-being

In the United States
Youth activism related to social issues
+
Media campaign to mobilize youth
↓
Reduction in smoking among youth

In Florida: Students Working Against Tobacco SWAT and Truth campaign
In Europe: Shape-Up Europe

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Operation Say It Loud!
Description of activities

1   Collaboration among partners and Promotion
2   Participant recruitment
3   "Special event" outside the school
4   Organization of a social action
5   Acknowledgements

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Operation Say It Loud!
Participant recruitment

- High-school students, teachers or other professionals, youth groups (posters, invitation card, Internet site)

- Promotion activities of greater intensity for targeted schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

- Teachers and other professionals are asked to recruit youth at risk of dropping out

↓

About 300 participants (250 students- 50 professionals)

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Operation Say It Loud!
"Special event" outside the school

Training and networking forum (2 days)

- Training workshops
  - Product marketing
  - Advocacy
  - Getting media coverage for projects

- Mobilization session
  - Creative activity
  - Definition and examples of social actions
  - Group brainstorm on possible public actions

- Workshop to choose a social action

- Practice in organizing an action

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Operation Say It Loud!
Organization of a social action

A social action project is structured

It includes a group of activities that aim to influence

- **the views of citizens**
- **business conduct**
- **directions established by decision makers**

Includes three types of action
- **Educating the community about the issues**
- **Communications**
- **Political representation**

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Operation Say It Loud!
Organizingn a social action

Examples of social action

- Making a video posted on YouTube denouncing strawberry-flavoured cigarillos
  (http://pq.poumon.ca/pdf/SF/player_gangallume_flv.swf)

- Street theatre to denounce packaging that looks like candy and flavoured products, and to demand regulations

  Also, submission of a petition to the National Assembly

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Operation Say It Loud!
Influence of context

Funding
- Funding agencies require that projects target many of people

Organisational conditions
- The support of the school administration influences youths' and professionals' participation (time off, meal offered)
- The profile of young participants depends on recruitment by teachers and other professionals (students at risk or those who are most successful)

Professional practices
- Conducting social action projects depends on the expertise of health and education professionals

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Mobilijeunes

Joliane Alaire MSc

L'Équipe d'intervention théâtrale *Mise au Jeu*

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Mobilijeunes
Objectives

Involving youth in a process of reflection and action that will enable them to question and act on ways to change their environment and mobilize others

Developing and encourage youth to use their individual and social abilities to become dynamic and inclusive **agent of change**

Developing youth's feeling of belonging to their community and to contribute to their social relations

Allowing youth to choose, on a **voluntary basis**, to elaborate a collective social action to address social issues of concern to them

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Mobilijeunes
Foundation / Action Theory

The premise of Paolo Freire

People who are experiencing oppressing situations or conflicts are the best specialists to find appropriate solutions adapted to their reality.

Participants have developed knowledge that are intimately related to their own experience.

This learning is based on a process not only based on quantifiable results.

This dialogue does not necessarily involved the resolution of the issue, but allow to consider the situation differently. (Hamel, 2008)

Mobilijeunes
Foundation / Action Theory

Artistic Foundation

Art is a unique and important means to capture and represent everyday experiences.

Theatrical art provides an opportunity to emotionally touch people, spark desire to look differently at familiar circumstances and a readiness to create social action that reflect a variety of opinions.

Active participation from otherwise 'bystanders' is a central element of our artistic process.

Mobilijeunes
Description of activities / implementation

1. Mise au jeu gets in touch with the participating schools
2. Presentation of the forum theatre play (***Qui ne dit mot...*** ou ***Simon says...)***
3. Meet with interested youth
4. **Accompany and support** for each group; students and the school staff
5. Gala to recognize the participants' progress and involvement

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Mobilijeunes
Description of activities / implementation

Accompany and support for each group; students and the school staff

- Establishing concrete objectives
- Listening
- Having flexibility
- Taking the time and providing the necessary support
- Facilitate ACTION
- Reinforcing and building links with other community organisations

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Mobilijeunes
Influence of context

Funding
- Requirements imposed by funding agencies may impose particular health topics; students must choose topics they would not have chosen otherwise

Organisational conditions
- Every school evolve in different context and have different needs, the project have to accommodate them

- School support is precondition for success; allowing time for students to miss class, allowing time for school staff, offering lunch, providing credit, disseminating final work)

Professionnel practices
- Community-building expertise is rarely used or legitimated by the school community

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Key points / Conclusion

1. Youth empowerment interventions take form through results-driven and process-driven strategies;
    - Both are needed for youth action based strategies that aim to build healthy environments
    - Fostering relationships; emphasis upon results may reinforce power imbalance
2. The emergence of these strategies is influenced by context;
    - Interests of the funding agency
    - School context
    - Professional practices
    3. Evidence is needed to help health education & promotion professionals navigate process and results driven youth action based strategies.

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Thank you for your attention!

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