

The vulnerability of linguistic minority youth and the prevention of drug misuse: An intervention reflecting daily experience of early adolescents

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International Association of Schools of Social Work, Stockholm, July 10th 2012 | Contact: mdrolet@uottawa.ca



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Linguistic minority youth

- Social work has rarely focused on linguistic minorities (Harrison, 2009).
- Language is an important symbol of community identity (Leclerc, 2007). It becomes a powerful factor in terms of social belonging because it rallies members around a common history, culture and shared traditions.
- At the same time, language appears to be a differentiation factor for other social groups, even an exclusion factor for those who speak the socially, economically and politically minority language, this one rarely being used in the public sphere.
- Youth in difficulty from such communities are viewed as being more culturally disadvantaged and at risk because of linguistic disadvantage (Lee, 2009).

Sense of belonging and prevention of drug misuse

- When preventive interventions geared to teens have been based on in-depth analysis of risk and protective factors, significant progress has resulted (Jenson, 2010).
- A sense of school belonging is a potent protection factor in the experiences of those youth who, like teens from linguistic minorities, engage in few activities outside the school setting (Shears et al, 2006).
- Affiliations among peers and their influence on the adoption of healthy or at-risk behaviours are important factors among adolescents (Monahan, Steinberg and Cauffman, 2009).
- The desire to belong to a group can influence a teen's conduct even before he or she actually joins one; the adolescent will already take on the behaviours of the peer group in order to ensure acceptance (Brown & Larson, 2009)
- Feeling of belonging to such groups shaped by:
 - » a sense that one is recognized by peers
 - » the self-esteem stemming therefrom (Newman, Lohman and Newman, 2007)

Frame of Reference: Positive Social Development

- The ties that an adolescent manages to establish with people or through activities contribute toward his or her process of socialization. The strength of each of those ties depends on:
 - » 1) possibilities the young adolescent perceived for participating in stimulating activities or forging rewarding and fun relationships
 - » 2) the extent of involvement required
 - » 3) skills required
 - » 4) positive reinforcement stemming from activities or relationships
- When an adolescent commits to forming a relationship, that teen will keep in mind the costs and benefits of his or her choice in terms of people who are the closest and whose opinions matter the most, including friends (Catalano and Hawkins, 1996)

Research Questions

- What are the impacts of the implementation of Lions Quest Skills for Adolescence as perceived by the principal players (adolescents 12-14 years of age, teachers)?
- What characteristics of a sense of belonging to the school are brought forth by the young teens interviewed?
- In what way does the program contribute to the understanding of healthy interpersonal relationships among early adolescents?

Program: Lions Quest Skills for Adolescence: www.lions-quest.org

- Evidence-based program: Eisen, Zellman, Massett and Murray, 2002 <http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention>
- Overall goal: Prevent or delay the consumption of alcohol or drugs during adolescence
- Specific objectives for early adolescents. The program aims to develop:
 - » 1) the ability to be affirmative and resist negative peer pressure
 - » 2) a sense of responsibility
 - » 3) conflict resolution skills
 - » 4) the ability to intervene with peers who begin to consume

Methodology

- 50 in-depth semi-structured interviews held in 3 schools in Eastern Ontario, between January and July 2010:
 - » 26 teens: Grades 7 and 8 francophones and anglophones
 - 8 participated in the program in 2009-2010
 - 18 participated in 2008-2009
 - » 11 school personnel: teachers (N=5), school administrators (N=4) and social workers (N=2)
 - » 13 parents (of the young teens involved in 2008-2009)
- On-site case studies (Yin, 2006) led to inter-case comparisons (Stake, 2009)
- Deductive and inductive analyses of the transcripts (Huberman and Miles, 1991)

Findings

OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED AS PERCEIVED BY THE TEACHERS WHO CARRIED OUT THE PROGRAM: TOOLS THAT PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY ADOLESCENTS

- **Self-confidence:** emphasis on increasing and making it an integral element of daily life
 - » Sandra (pseudonym), very insecure. She often wanted to change schools, she had problems with other girls and got into arguments. She turned inward (...) She decided to take the situation in hand (...) How did the program help her through these troubles? Certainly in the area of self-confidence

- **Self-assertion:** healthy self-confidence leads to more frank self-expression and the ability to defend one's opinions in a positive manner without fear of intimidation
 - » It takes courage for some kids to express themselves away from a group setting. (...) But these discussions at school show them how to have confidence in their own beliefs, then they think "Great, OK, this is how I feel about things; I may be for or against something but I have my reasons, and they're different from other people's."
- **Healthier interpersonal relationships:** perceived as a more positive approach on the part of the students
 - » Matt (pseudonym) demonstrated a serious behavioral problem. While we were conducting the Lions Quest program, there was a moment when everything clicked into place, and he changed (...). He gives his all when he discusses something; by expressing himself with words instead of gestures, intimidation and violence when he's mad as heck.

OBJECTIVES AS PERCEIVED BY THE EARLY ADOLESCENTS: TOOLS THAT PROMOTE POSITIVE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR PEERS

- **Interpersonal relationships:** working together and accepting others
 - » I would never be that social in the classroom because, like I'm shy and I don't talk to anybody. (...) But you know, by the end, everybody was beginning to say: "You know what, she really is fun to be with, let's go hang out with her." (...) that gave me a better impression about myself.
- **Self-confidence:** program channels adolescents toward acknowledging their strengths; reflecting on decisions and defending positively their points of view
 - » We found our class fun because Madame was organizing lots of activities and we learned by doing things. We're more confident about ourselves now.

Discussion

- The positive perceptions of those early adolescents largely outweigh the negative impression that can be created by peer pressure at this age (one of the objectives of Lions Quest is to resist to it).
- The young adolescents retained elements of the program that led them to reflect on their relationships with friends and offered them useful tools for improving relationships and making them ever more positive.
- The need to fit in that is a characteristic of young teens, or to forge meaningful ties within their group of friends, provided a springboard for the phase of reflection laid out by the Lions Quest program (Ryan and Deci, 2000).
- The teachers integrated program content into the dynamic of their classrooms, as well as into the individual daily experience of the early adolescents, allowing themselves greater opportunity to relate to these young people and be more credible.
- Fraser et al. (2011) suggest linking the prevention and intervention programs with the experiences of the participants and relativising the concept of fidelity in their implementation.
- Finally, the proximity that results from listening to and accompanying early adolescents in day-to-day activities, and comprehending their issues, presents an opportunity to youth workers and school staff to better grasp how to become credible, trusted and legitimate in the eyes of young teens.

Acknowledgements



OLMC (Official Language
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We sincerely thank the administrations, teachers and school board members who supported this project, as well as the young adolescents and parents from Eastern Ontario who participated in the interviews. We also thank the multi-service agency, *Valoris for Children and Adults of Prescott-Russell*, for their generous and constant support.