Making Creative Connections:

Evaluating Youth Learning and Action through Artistic Expression

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Introduction

- Alberta Social and Health Equity Network (ASHEN)

- Worked with youth (ages 15-30) in three Alberta cities

- Art as a medium for learning, connection, engagement
Arts in Evaluation

From Simons & McCormack (2007):

- “In a climate dominated by the language of targets, outcomes, outputs and delivery – using the creative arts can generate insight from different ways of knowing and bring us closer to capturing and understanding the evaluation’s story”

- Creative expression draws on peoples’ own practical wisdom, brings their tacit knowledge into an evaluation context and recognizes their contribution
Broad Objectives

The project used the creation of art to:

- further youth’s understanding of SDOH
- connect youth with others in similar life circumstances
- engage youth through arts-based community development
- create ways to share youth experiences, knowledge and art with decision-makers and the public
- raise awareness and facilitate action on youth concerns – by decision-makers and public
Key Strategies

- Foster youth control
- Foster positive relationship building
- Use participatory learning approach re health, SDOH, strategies for change
- Network with the broader community
- Raise awareness in the broader community
- Facilitate creative expression (foundation on which the above strategies rest)
Logic Model

- More specific outcomes and activities – based on the broad objectives and key strategies – are in a logic model

(Model designed by Krista Russell – Masters Student – Centre for Health Promotion Studies, School of Public Health, University of Alberta)
Figure 1: ASHEN Youth Capacity Project Logic Model

**Goal** - To increase the engagement of vulnerable youth within Alberta in civic activity both locally and provincially.

**Intermediate Outcomes**
- Participating youth feel empowered to speak up on health and social issues
- Links are established between vulnerable youth and local advocates/decision-makers/people of influence
- Increased public awareness of the SDOH that vulnerable youth feel influence them
- The local community recognizes the need for initiatives aimed at improving the health of vulnerable youth.

**Long-term Outcomes**
- Participating vulnerable youth take actions that would have a positive impact on the SDOH of concern in their lives.
- Vulnerable youth are included at the community level in forums/initiatives related to the SDOH.

**Short-term Outcomes**
- Participating youth feel connected to other youth as part of a group that cares about each other's well-being
- Participating youth feel comfortable expressing themselves
- Participating youth express themselves creatively
- Participating youth feel a sense of ownership for the work they are doing
- Leadership skills emerge
- Participating youth understand the concept of SDOHs
- Participating youth identify SDOH that impact on their own lives
- Participating youth express interest in changing the SDOH that are having a negative impact on their lives
- Participating youth identify potential actions to bring about change.

**Activities**
- Foster youth control
  - Involve youth in ongoing decision making
  - Provide opportunities for interested youth to take a leadership role
- Foster positive relationship building
  - Meet on a regular basis
  - Facilitate respectful interaction
- Use participatory learning approach to build knowledge on health, the SDOH and strategies for change
- Network with the broader community
  - Hold a program launch
  - Set up meetings with people of influence/local decision makers
- Facilitate creative expression

**Target Audience**
Primary audience: Youth 18-30 years of age who are disengaged within the local community and struggling with issues that affect their health.

**Resources**
- Funding, program coordinator, advisory committee, ASHEN members, local coordinators, space to meet and work, varied art supplies/resources

**Community service agencies, local politicians and bureaucrats, members of the broader community**

**Funding, program coordinator, advisory committee, ASHEN members, local coordinators, space to meet and work, varied art supplies/resources**
Participants

- Lethbridge (April 2006 start)
  - 40 youth in total; core group of about 14
  - 8-12 on a typical night (both sexes)
  - Met twice a week in rented studio space
  - Strong sense of group identity (Youth Art and Political Pirates)
Participants

- Lethbridge

- Art was mostly visual – drawing and painting
- Some poetry
- Group meetings to create art led to discussions about social issues that affect youth – e.g., environment, education, transportation
Participants

- Calgary (August 2006 start)
  - About 50 youth total (both sexes)
  - Recovering or wanting to recover from crystal meth addiction
  - Recruited through street outreach by community-based addiction recovery agency
  - Transient participation – youth came & went as they wished - drop-in format on flexible schedule
Participants

- Calgary

- Art was creating quilts
- Youth made drawings in a tattoo style - transferred to cloth and sewn together by youth
- Messages came from group discussions involving scenarios about factors influencing meth use
- Youth interested in raising awareness of meth issues among other youth, policy-makers and public
BE fucking strong

I Didn't change... I grew

DON'T DO METH - RESULT is DEATH

DON'T DO METH, KEEP IT OUT OF YOU

MET... MET... MET...
Participants

- Edmonton (September 2006 start)
  - 3-4 participants; Aboriginal; all female
  - Project housed in Aboriginal agency
  - Agency not well-connected to project – led to recruitment challenges
Participants

- Edmonton
  - Art included drawing, poetry, beading
  - Some discussion about education and social issues affecting Aboriginal peoples
  - Future interest in video work
Methods Overview

- Interviews with three co-ordinators
- Two focus groups with Lethbridge group – seven people first time; 10 second time
- Art interview/observation with six youth
- Youth forum in Calgary with all three groups (all of the above recorded on DVD)
- Local process documentation
Participatory Process

- Overall approach participatory

  - Interview and focus group questions broad; process informal and conversational (e.g., why youth come, what they get out of group, what they like & don’t, successes, challenges, relationships, next steps, suggestions)
  - Youth and co-ordinators could bring up additional issues as they wished
Participatory Process

- Lethbridge co-ordinator and one youth worked with one of the evaluators (Yanicki) on initial coding of data from the second focus group

- Members of group will provide feedback on broad themes pulled from the data by Horne
Participatory Process

- Youth can review and comment on the final report if they wish

- Co-ordinators will review a narrative report about the issues they raised to assess whether it reflects their perspectives – and suggest revisions if they wish
Challenges

- Projects had been running for various lengths of time, and had more differences in process than expected.

- Some youth did not want to participate in evaluation (saw it as ‘government’, not comfortable sharing with an adult stranger, had experiences with programs being taken away) – trust takes a lot of time.
Challenges

- Not all youth who were regular participants were able to attend the second Lethbridge focus group and participate in art interviews.

- Not all youth were comfortable discussing the meaning of their art with an evaluator whom they had only met twice (this was respected).
Challenges

- Not all youth could participate in data coding.
- Local process data not consistent or complete due to nature of program — coordinators’ time limited -- relationship-building & creating an informal, comfortable environment took priority over data collection.
Analysis

- Qualitative
  - Initial open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)
  - Similar codes combined, grouped into a few broad themes (initial codes were broader for art interviews to avoid reductionism regarding the youth’s images)
  - Two evaluators worked on coding & shared perspectives for focus group & art interview data
  - Co-ordinator data will be a composite narrative to minimize identification of individual co-ordinators
Analysis: Lethbridge Example

- Youth & co-ordinator had opportunity to input into initial open coding, and will review broad themes
- Evaluators will examine final themes in light of health promotion frameworks and concepts (e.g., social inclusion, community capacity, Ottawa Charter for HP)
Art Interviews: Interpretations by the Young Artists

- Following slides show four images, overall issue/concern represented by each image, interview codes, examples of artists’ comments underlying the codes

- Interpretations are still being confirmed with the artists – so the following is draft

- First artist is male, others are female (ages approx 18-21)
“Oil Brilliant” (title) – concern about environmental impact

Personal behaviour connects to environment (thinking about nicotine led to thinking about car exhaust)

Oil as poison (oil-covered sperm, babies, mud)

Negative corporate power (industry, media – images of oil wells connected with media/movie characters, demon)

Bright images cover death (coloured skulls, rainbow)

Climate change (snowman melting under green sun)

Change – opportunity, question status quo (door, celebrities)
Concern about how environment influences health

Toxic stuff hurts health (going in body, look sick, need clean air for health)

Negative industry influence (smog)

Many influences on environment (many lines contribute to clean air)
Expressing loss of a good friend

Drawing of hands to honour friend who committed suicide

Loss of close friend (his & her hands, pressed hands through glass at airport last time she saw him, smearing)

Symbol of death (smearing)

Spiritual influence (Runic symbols – “never understanding life – fearing death”)
Celebrating personal power

Dragon image (airbrush)

Feeling powerful (teeth showing, eyes watching)

In control – have power
Example Themes: Focus Group

- Broad themes from Lethbridge group (draft):
  - Sense Of Belonging
  - Finding Our Voice
  - Taking Action For Change
  - Shared Values Within Group
  - Commitment To Overcoming Challenges
  - Appreciation Of Experience In The Group
Example Mid-Range Categories: Focus Group

- Sense of Belonging
  - Social Inclusion
  - Feeling Understood in the Group
  - Feeling Excluded at School
Example Open Codes: Focus Group

- **Social Inclusion**
  - Acceptance/Inclusion
  - Safe Place/Social Inclusion
  - New People Welcome/Friendships Expand
  - Diversity Respected
  - No One Judges You Here
Example Quotes: Focus Group

- Acceptance/Inclusion
  - “Acceptance…it was always a given. That’s how it is.”
  - “They are open…I was so happy after being here…”
  - “This group holds more of a sense of belonging than school”
Summary Points

- Youth used art to engage with each other and with issues relevant to personal and community well-being.
- Art and group discussions reflected a focus on personal and community capacity building, and advocacy for social change.
- Qualitative and participatory methods gave voice to youth – to share relevant processes and outcomes in their own words.
Summary Points

- Data collection flexible enough for youth and co-ordinators to raise their own issues
- Youth and co-ordinators have had opportunities to be involved in data interpretation
- Much enthusiasm to continue the project – co-ordinators in all three cities have plans for sustainability
References


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