

Reaction to: Lobbying for endorsement of community psychology in Australia
 By Cohen, Dean, Gridley, Hogeia, Robinson, Sampson, Sibbel & Turner
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“The proof of the pudding is in the eating.”

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I would like to salute the dedication of all Australians involved in this accomplishment. It is an important contribution to the affirmation of community psychology and we will all benefit. Before commenting on the main issue, I want to acknowledge that we can learn many more things from their paper, amongst them: 1) lobbying is a useful tool, 2) our allies should be diverse and are not necessarily where we think they are at first; 3) timing is just about everything. Their paper could be recommended reading for *Influencing Policy* because it helps us understand the collaborative process that is needed to influence policy decision-making and the necessity of informing and persuading.

It is often debated whether gaining recognition by a National Regulatory Board is what needs to be prioritized to develop community psychology. For various reasons, few of us choose to undertake this quest. Then something in our ecological niche changes that gives us the impulse to do so. In the Province of Québec (Canada), we also chose to ask for official status from the *Ordre des psychologues de la province de Québec* (OPQ) which is the official Provincial Regulatory Board for psychology, each provincial board in Canada being independent. What stimulated our decision was a redefinition of the diploma of entrance to the practice of psychologist by the OPQ and a resulting reshuffling of many graduate training programs in the province. Québec was one of the few Canadian provinces that up to that point accepted a Master's as the diploma of entrance to the OPQ (with a Generalist registration) but it was now to become a Doctorate (Ph.D. or D. Psy). As we were already offering graduate training in community psychology in our department of psychology (the other University doing so being Université du Québec à Montréal), we thought it wise to aim for the development of a fully independent program in community psychology and to ask for its recognition by the Provincial Board. The chairman of our department was a strong believer in the diversity of psychology and in the contribution of community psychology. Our colleagues were less

empathic but the three professors in community psychology saw this redefinition of programs as an opportunity. There are proportionally more than twice as many psychologists in Quebec as in the other provinces of Canada. This amounts to 7 150 psychologists, of which 75% are women. We thought that community psychology, with its values on social justice and empowerment, could earn its place.

The OPQ has the mandate to certify the programs which correspond to standards ensuring quality of practice and protection of the population. If the doctoral program of a university is not on their list, its graduates cannot become members of the Provincial Board and thus are not allowed to use the designation *Psychologist*. In Québec, there is no endorsement of areas of speciality such as community psychology, clinical psychology, counselling psychology, etc., unlike Australia, where nine areas are now recognized. If the faculty members interested in community psychology at Université Laval had not developed a fully independent doctoral program, the only path to become a psychologist and member of the OPQ, would have been to be a graduate of an accredited clinical program. Organizational psychology faced the same problem community psychology did. The Ph.D. program in *Research and intervention in community psychology* at Université Laval was accredited by the OPQ in 2003 and community psychology was thus indirectly endorsed as an area of practice within the provincial registration system.

So, are we happy? Are we better recognized? At the provincial level, yes. At the local level, no. The proverb, "*The proof of the pudding is in the eating*" seems the perfect descriptive sentence from my point of view. I like the English expression but let us not forget that the first author may have been Spanish- Miguel Cervantes- or French- Nicolas Boileau! I think that we, at Université Laval, simply choked on our pudding. Two main ingredients were lacking: the support of our proximate community, our colleagues; and a proper

understanding of the lack of interest among students in what we were proposing in our program. It is easy to identify *Colleagues* and *Students* as responsible for our failure; things are more complicated than that, for sure. I would suggest that a lack of resources is the main explanation. Having only three professors responsible for the program along with a few other collaborating colleagues, and with no possibility of recruiting additional staff, led to a restricted choice of courses and practica. The administrative requirements of the Provincial Board were also numerous and added to the work of the professors. The burden associated with the large number of students choosing the clinical program influenced our colleagues to concentrate on this speciality, which became nearly synonymous with the orientation of the whole department of psychology. We had gambled that the endorsement of community psychology by the OPQ would consolidate the intent of students and be an additional motivation to pursue a Ph.D. in community psychology. We were wrong. Our program is now suspended and we no longer accept new students. The only remaining accredited program in community psychology in the province of Quebec is at Université du Québec à Montréal. The coming years will show if they succeed in recruiting psychology students with social concerns. And this will remain also an important issue for Australia.

What were the positive aspects of being endorsed by the OPQ? I would suggest two aspects. First, it made us better as a program. We were invited to define the skills to be developed in the practica and in the internship and this led to lively discussions and finally got us involved in thinking more about the practical training of our graduates (Lavoie & Brunson, 2010). Second, we contributed to our discipline of psychology as a whole through our criticism of the OPQ's Agreement Manual on Training: we repeatedly challenged the mandatory nature of a course in Psychopharmacology for all psychologists and denounced the near omission in the Manual of the importance of context and culture. Yes, this is still possible in the 2010's.

As our Australian colleagues wrote, "Every 2-4 years there is a crisis in which community psychology needs to review its status." We have consolidated one area, the recognition by a regulatory board of the practice in community psychology. But "(...) the battle keeps needing to be fought" with new resources and a new generation. And by the way, we have other things to do.....to change the world. I raise my glass (of Québec cider) to our Australian colleagues and look forward to tasting their Australian pudding.

References

Lavoie, F., & Brunson, L. (2010). La pratique de la psychologie communautaire. *Psychologie canadienne*, 51(2), 96-105.
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