

PORTRAIT OF INTERVENTION

PETITS CUISTOTS – PARENTS EN RÉSEAUX (PC-PR) 2005/2006

INTERVENTION

Petits cuistots - parents en réseaux (translated as *Junior cooks - Parents network*) is an innovative school nutrition intervention project in Montreal that is designed to encourage healthy eating among children and their families along with the integration of parents into school and neighbourhood social networks. The project is being piloted in eight primary schools in Montreal, in both disadvantaged areas and multi-ethnic neighbourhoods. Through school-based activities, children from kindergarten to sixth grade are taught about food preparation and healthy eating through cooking and nutritional workshops. Parents participate in the workshops and are invited to join mutual health networks in collaboration with other neighbourhood community organizations. The nutrition intervention is hosted by a community organization: *Les ateliers cinq épices*.

The *Junior Cooks- Parents Network* project responds to the concerns and priorities of the Government of Quebec, more specifically the Ministers of Health and Education, school and community institutions. As part of the *Formation de l'école québécoise* (translated as the *Quebec Education Program*) the Minister of Education in Quebec recognizes the important role of the school to advance understanding of current health issues, well-being and the adoption of healthy life practises. Programs that support the uptake and maintenance of food responsibility through community supported action are seen as a priority. Health promotion strategies which improve the cohesion between the school and familial environments are viewed as effective means to meet and respond to educational mandates. In addition to meeting these educational mandates, the *Junior Cooks- Parents Network* also joins the preventative and promotional approach of the *Direction de la santé publique* which supports healthy nutrition capacity and culinary appreciation to counter growing health issues associated with malnutrition, notably, obesity, type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

The project *Junior cooks - Parents network* consists of two axes. The first, *Junior Cooks*, focuses upon school aged children from 4 to 12 year olds. Children receive kitchen-nutrition workshops (8 per year, during 8 years) during the regular school timetable with the agreement and collaboration of teaching personnel. Kitchen-nutrition workshops (hereafter referred simply to as workshops) are created and animated by registered dietitians. The *Junior Cooks* component of the intervention favours the acquisition of knowledge concerning healthy eating habits, food preparation and culinary competences. Together these components aim to increase students' interest in food and motivation towards healthy eating. The *Junior Cooks* workshops creates a space for the development of the *Parents Network* axe of the intervention whereby parents are invited to participate in the workshops of their child and in so doing, support the nutritionist with delivery of the workshop. During the workshop, parents are met by a community development worker whose aim is to maintain the parents interest in the workshop and expand their participation by proposing that parents join other intervention related activities and outings. The *Parents Network* axe of the intervention thus aims to translate parental participation into an apprenticing experience of social responsibility, based on the active parental participation at school and the organisation of family activities or exchange of activities between parents. These two axes of the intervention are linked by the

interest of parents, maintaining nutritional intervention education and by privileging school-family relations.

Junior Cooks

The *Junior Cooks* axe can be divided into three separate components, and while the student and nutritionist occupy the primary role across each, the teacher, the nutritionist and the parent take a distinct leadership role for each component. Prior to each monthly workshop, teachers are asked to complete a preparatory exercise with their class. This form of exercise is known as a effective pedagogic tool amongst teachers. For the dieticians, the preparatory exercise offers support to their objectives by bringing the workshop subject further into regular classroom activities and also by facilitating the animation of the workshop by permitting the dieticians to explore students understandings and connect with them on the subject through their active learning. Teachers can choose to completely or partially carry out the preparatory activities in class or allow the children to work on the activities themselves at home with their family. This method is described as advantageous as it is not restrictive for the teacher and allows a maximum collaboration and participation from interested parents.

The second component of the *Junior Cooks* axe proposes an activity of reinvestment or consolidation to the home life of the student. Here, at the completion of the workshop, students are given a sample of their completed recipe as well as the recipe itself for them to take home and demonstrate to their family. The aim is for students to complete the recipe or a related activity at home which in turn acts as a strategy to capture the parents interest in the intervention. Finally, the third component of is *Junior Cooks* is the activities which take place during the nutrition workshop itself. Importantly, this components provides the entry point for the second axe (*Parents Network*) of the intervention, whereby a community development worker works in collaboration with the dietician, the teacher and the participating parents.

Nutrition workshops last for one to one and a half hours (depending upon the school and the teacher) and offer students concrete experiences with food through food preparation and tasting activities. Each of the eight annual workshops features a food item and nutrition theme with a recipe for a collective food preparation and tasting experience. The introduction of new themes throughout the six year-curriculum exposes students to new or alternative foods (e.g. tofu, chick peas), ecological issues (e.g. choosing local food produce), international cuisine (e.g. Indian, Mexican), food types (e.g. berries, cereals, cheese) and health issues (e.g. fast food, satiety, hydration). Nutritionists also provide instruction with educational materials to support the specific learning objectives of the workshop. The learning objectives are developed in function of the grade level of the students, whether they be in preschool, cycle 2 or cycle 3. Classroom teachers (and parents) participate by providing classroom management and program support. Each workshop includes; 1) didactic knowledge transmission addressing theme specific topics such as food transformation, food types, nutrition and health; 2) hands-on recipe completion using a cooperative learning approach; and 3) tasting of the finished recipe with samples to be taken home. More specifically, the time distribution of the workshop is divided into six periods; 1) favouring the reinvestment of the preparatory activity, 2) a theoretical section taught in a magisterial approach by the nutritionist, 3) a pedagogic game reinforce the appropriation of knowledge acquisition objectives, 4) experimentation of the recipe, where the students are active in their apprenticeship (accompanied by parents), 5) an objectification period in the form of a collective return on the activity, which puts forward the difficulties and apprenticeships met, 6) the tasting and presentation of reinvestment activities.

Another key feature of the workshop is the integration of specific learning and work method objectives which respond to educational mandates. In this respect, the Junior Cooks axe of the intervention is described as integrating with several goals from the Quebec Education Program (QEP). The Preschool and Elementary QEP underwent an important reformulation during the last part of the 20th century. The new QEP or 'reform' is identified as a response to the socio-cultural trends, including: internalization, globalization, information explosion, rapid technological development and the growing complexity of social life. Beyond the subject specific focus of the educational program, the reform identifies two new areas of concentration, cross curricular competencies and broad areas of learning. Cross-curricular competencies are generic in nature and refer to intellectual, methodological, personal and social and communication-related competencies which are used in various subject areas. Broad areas of learning aim to bridge the boundaries between the multiple realities of the child, including the school, home and community. Broad areas of learning aim to enable students to look critically at their personal, social and cultural environment.

The *Junior Cooks* intervention is described as responding to several of the goals of the QEP, including general formation (health and wellbeing, environment and consummation and living together and citizenship) and several specific disciplinary competences (personal development and science and technology). Beyond these areas of overlap which have been formally identified between the Quebec Education Program and the *Junior Cooks-Parents Network* intervention, the approach privileged by the dietician within the various workshop periods may favour a targeted competency in accordance with objectives which are specific to the grade level, the school specific program and the pedagogic style and learning objectives of the classroom teacher. For example, transversal competences of methodological order, personal and social order may or may not be emphasized during the collaborative food preparation activity by encouraging and supporting students to inclusively work together during the completion of the recipe. Disciplinary competences linked to personal development, competences in the science and technology may be more or less emphasized according to the way in which the nutritionist and the teacher agree to distribute the time and the workshop activities.

Parental Networks

The second component (*Parental Networks*) is organized by community development workers and aims to support the development of mutual support networks through parents' active involvement in the school. Parents are invited to participate with their child during the nutrition workshops and as well to attend collective dinners and family visits to local food producers (e.g. local squash producer, cheese production, maple syrup, apple picking). The ultimate objective of *Parental Networks* is to promote citizenship and a sense of social conscience among young school children and their families. This axe of the intervention allows a link to be made between the parents of the students participating in the *Junior Cooks* project, the school, existing community networks through the bias of food and food preparation. Parents are invited to play an active role by suggesting themes and changes to the intervention through information meetings named *Gourmet Gourmands* (whereby parents meet and prepare evening meals together). This allows a moment of exchange around a meal prepared by one of the parents. Other input from parents is delivered through a specific paper at each school, which leaves room for parents to share they're opinions related both to the intervention and the school as a whole. Families also join the school through the *Junior Cooks* during a graduation party at the end of the school year, which will recognises the participation of each student in the workshops, valorising the food preparation and nutrition

competencies they have developed. Many of these activities contribute equally to cultural exchanges and the integration of newly arrived families in Quebec. The access to a healthy regime in their countries of origin may be very different to the access they have in their new country. This is the case in the majority of industrialised countries who have a strong migratory vocation.

The *Parents Network* axe of the intervention is rooted in principles of community building and participation whereby community interventions are not aiming to manage poverty but rather to work toward the development of people and their environment. Parents which are met at the workshops are sensitized into organising and participating in diverse activities in collaboration with the community development workers. This axe aims to develop individual resources, group strength and mutual aid. This component of the program also joins the objectives of the Quebec Education Program by building links to neighbouring community organisations and initiatives, and as well to parents. Here, increasing parental participation in the school and improving community representation is one of the cornerstones of the Quebec Education Program.

Junior cooks - Parents network Objectives

1. To plan and run workshops that favour the acquisition of the notions of healthy nutrition and culinary apprenticeship.
2. Propose preparatory activities to teachers and arouse the interest to carry out the activities in class or at home.
3. Valorize the implication of parents in the nutrition-kitchen workshops as animation support.
4. To increase the Junior Cooks in other schools.
5. Create links of confidence with parents who participate in the workshops.
6. Allow families to get out of their isolation and to facilitate the closure of the gap between them.
7. Put *Les ateliers cinq épices* into a framework with other social actors and together with other community partners, reach parents of school children.

LES ATELIERS CINQ ÉPICES (HUMAN RESOURCES AND PARTNERS)

The *Ateliers cinq épices* (*Five spices workshop*) is a non profit community organisation responsible for the financing, creation and delivery of the *Junior cooks - Parents network* intervention. The *Commission scolaire de Montréal* (Montreal School Board) and the *Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon*, a privately run charitable foundation, have provided funding for the project since 2001. At the time of the 2005/2006 progress report, the *Five spices workshop* organisation had successfully come out of a financial ‘crisis’ which resulted in lowered salary support for dieticians during the summer of 2005. Consequently, the majority of dieticians left the program to find employment elsewhere. The community organisation consisted of the following paid employees;

General Director (Ms. Tremblay) Program co-founder, director of program, registered dietitian

Administrative Director

Administrative assistant

5 full time Registered Dieticians L'Ordre professionnel des diététistes du Québec

2 part time Registered Dieticians L'Ordre professionnel des diététistes du Québec

1 community development worker

ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL

The administrative council meets 8 times per year in order to follow the organism's situation and take all the measures possible so that its mission can be pursued. Decision making on financing, planning and evaluation of the intervention occurs with the administrative council. The members of the council actively implicate themselves in acquiring financial support and maintaining financial wellbeing

One parent, also a registered dietician sits on the council. Until 2005, the program interventionists did not have a seat within the administrative council. However, following a request, the administrative council allowed representation of employees through allotting an observational role within the council. The annual report states that this opening was appreciated by the employees and this participation helped to give a better appropriation of the stakes faced by the organism. The *Table de concertation sur la faim* (Coalition against hunger of greater Montreal) is a community activist group which lobby's for food security rights for vulnerable populations. This group has strongly advocated for the need for parental role within the intervention. The newest member on the committee is the dietician representing food producers and restaurants. The appearance of this seat coincided with the new financial support acquired by the organisation during 2005.

Mr A. Haddad Coordinator of community organisation « Solidarité Ahuntsic »

Mr. P. Tremblay Administrative director

Ms. M. Lemieux Program co-founder, director of program, registered dietitian

Mr. J. Roy Coalition against hunger of greater Montreal

Ms B. Leblanc Nutritionist- consultant for food processing companies and restaurants

FUNDING AGENCIES

While the *Montréal School Board* and the *Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon* provided funding for the project since 2001, following the financial hardships of the organisation during 2004, financial support was sought and acquired from other partners during 2005. New funding organisations include Centraide (or *United Way*) and the Health

