



**Transformative agency and
diversity promoting as part of a
collective career project for
young immigrant women**

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Québec 

Fonds de recherche – Nature et technologies
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Youth career guidance needs: access impeded

Context COVID concerns for youth well-being and mental health
Worrying rates of anxiety or depression were identified for almost 50% of young people (Santé Publique Estrie, 2021)

Issues related to lack of well-being in learning context (Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation, 2020)

Potential barriers to youth learning pathways

To their awareness of educational and professional opportunities

To access support practices of community organizations.

For young immigrant women, gender stereotypes can hinder career opportunities considered.

This may require career counselling intervention work to address these stereotypical representations.

Group career counseling



Group career counselling intervention work to address these stereotypical representations



It has had a positive impacts on the development of empowerment and a critical awareness of how those representations may affect their educational and professional choices (Ali et al., 2017; Chronister et al., 2020).



It provides mutual help and social bonds that were lacking during the pandemic situation (Dupuis & Bourgeois, 2023)



It helps to sustain learning and agency over their educational and professional choices (Dionne et al., 2022)

Partnership- Research

Partnership Engage Grants (SSHRC) COVID-19 - Practices to support the learning paths and well-being of young people in situations of precariousness (Lessard, Dionne, Rousseau, Nadeau, Supeno & Bourdon)

Maison Jeunes Est: Youth community organization established 40 years ago within low socioeconomic environment neighborhood

- Offer of supervision, help, support and accompaniment to young people from all backgrounds which may experienced personal, family, school and social problems
- Serve 1,000 young people/year for accommodation services and educational programmes
- The partnership agreement was established around the following common objective:
 - to initiate a collective project designed to develop collective agency and well-being among young people at risk of experiencing poverty.



Cultural-historical activity theory perspective

- Goal: development of the collective youth's transformative agency
- **Transformative agency:** people's commitment to social and collective activities through which, by creating and transforming the world in a sense that they value, these participants become active agents of their society in the face of obstacles or injustices they wish to overcome. (Stetsenko, 2023)
- **Collective activity:** resource for young women involved in the project to gain consciousness of their capacities and to develop their transformative agency.
- **Collective project:** process whereby a group of people first identify a need in their community, motivated by their desire to engage and act collectively.
- To do this, they mobilize their resources and try together – with community actors – to meet this need or solve this problem through a project for their well-being, and the well-being of their community (Dionne & Bélisle, 2021).



Collective project

Three dimensions: action, learning and recognition.

Action: transformative collective actions to meet the needs of the community, needs prioritized as a target by the group

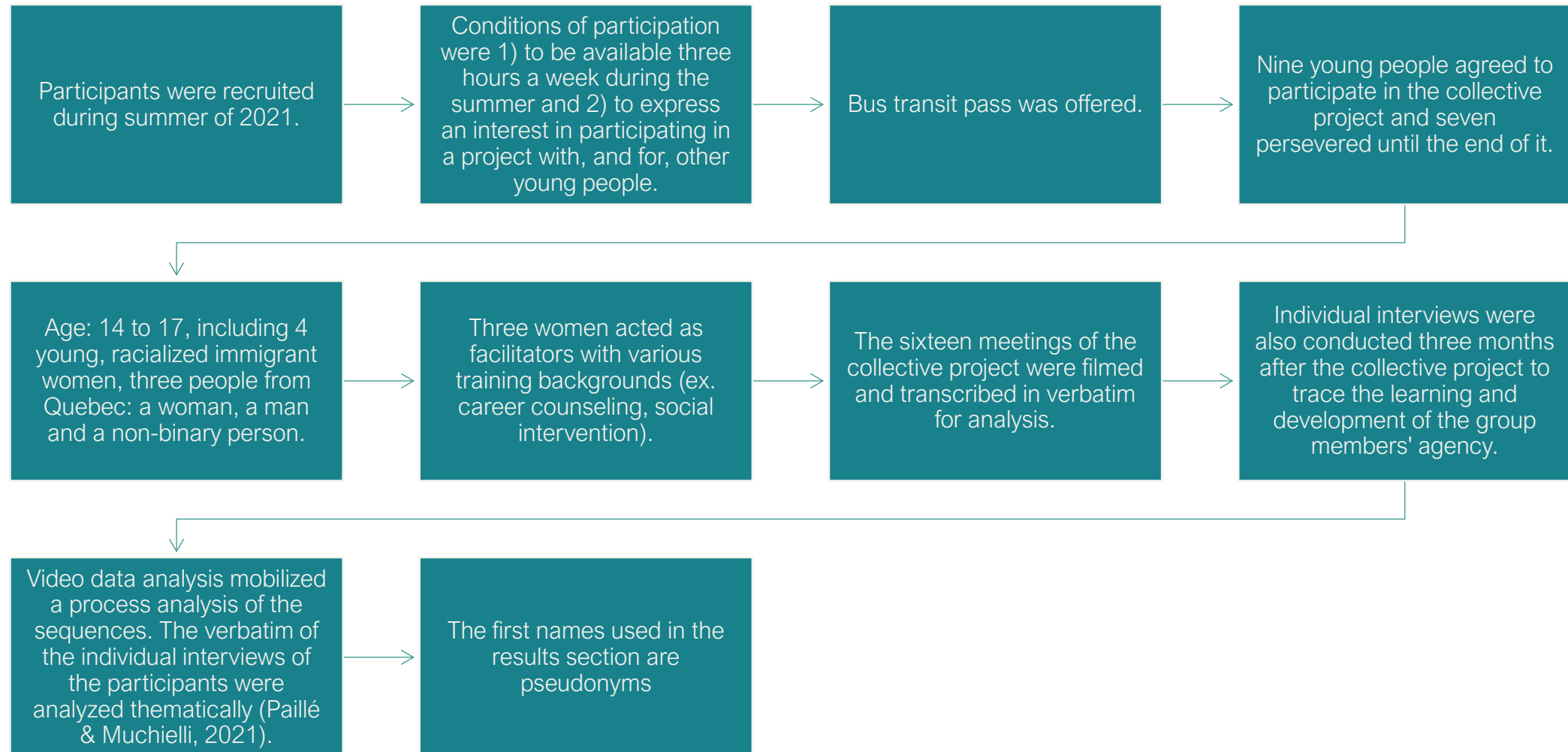
Learning : achieved with the help of cultural instruments, in and through action, and can affect the relation to oneself, to others and to the world (Dionne & Bélisle, 2021).

Recognition: is at the heart of all stages of the project thanks to the bonds of solidarity established between people and feedback on the value and contribution of young people in the project, at the very moment when they are taking action to achieve it.

Counselors provide the opportunity for participants to develop the 'capability for voice' (Otto et al., 2015) or, in other words, put their voice and their choices at the center of the project's progression.

The collective project is conceptualized as a **collective career project (CCP)** when actions, learning and recognition include helping individuals choose or consolidate a life trajectory so that they find their place in society and have an educational or professional project.

Methodology



Results

- Through the sixteen meetings, participants built meaningful relationships with their peers and facilitators.
- The facilitators invited young people to imagine their project and investigate the needs of their community.
- They were also creative self-presentation activities: silhouette of themselves: interests, worldview/projects, values
- After debating project options, the group chose the creation of a mural that draws a link between the isolation imposed by the pandemic, the mental health difficulties experienced and the need for young people to break this isolation by creating social ties
- Concern for their community is at the heart of their choice and stimulated their engagement during the completion of the project. As one participant, Sandrine points out, the sense of usefulness was very strong in the project:

We chose the project based on a concern for the mental health of young people in the context of the pandemic. I saw isolation in a family member— during the project, I felt useful, because I was taking notes on my tablet about what we were doing [in the coordination committee], I felt like I was helping and I thought it was fun for everyone to help each other... On the day we worked on the mural, I thought it was great, I was so proud of the atmosphere, the help from everyone and seeing the months of work that we had done come to fruition. (Sandrine)

Results

- During the project, several learning opportunities were made possible through all three committees: artistic, coordination, and communication.
- Young women took time during meetings to clarify their priorities in committees and action
- Through discussion the group created the concept behind the artistic production of the mural
- They also have made the necessary arrangements to obtain the permits and funding to create the mural
- Sandrine gave an exemple of one of her learnings

In the project, I learned to write letters asking for funding and I realize that people, politicians, are more accessible than we think. When we wrote to members of Parliament, I did not expect that we could just send them a letter asking for what and getting an answer. I didn't know. (Sandrine)

Collective pride and accomplishment in producing the mural

- During the process, many contradictions generated doubts about the possible accomplishment (ex. ambivalence by the first artist that the collective project was not feasible)
- Indeed, the realization of the mural created an intense collective pride.
- All participants painted the mural with the help of a second artist
- Festive atmosphere: music, laughing, dancing while painting
- High recognition of participants's skills in action by the counselors

I am proud of the involvement I made, I was in the artistic side, when we did the mural, the atmosphere was nice, We were sitting, I had the responsibility of making several bubbles (the mural concept), and it was difficult because of the height, but I really liked the atmosphere, I'm glad that all the people participated and made bubbles themselves and painted, it was cool. (Lisa)

Results

- The mural launch was also an important moment of recognition not only for the participants but also for family and the school community that were present for the launch (e.g. school principals, some teachers) :

“I was proud [at the launch] to introduce it to my parents, especially when the principal was there because she knew me a little bit and when she saw me she said “Hi! You are part of the project,” and I was proud too. I like it, being seen by superior people [laughs] and then my science teacher who says to me: Wow, that’s beautiful! You did that? - No, I did it [laughs], we did it.” And after that, they propose another mural project, it’s still good.” (Lisa)

- Moreover, perseverance was needed to overcome challenges encountered, which can facilitate the articulation of vocational goals:

In the project, I had lower motivation, and I was afraid that the results were not good and that we could not do it. I persevered because I did not want to let others down and I would not have liked to be in their place and that people drop the project. [...] For the prom committee, I now know that even if I don’t know if the decoration will be beautiful or if I have lower motivation, I can persevere. For the post-secondary studies, I was accepted in health sciences. The perseverance of the project will also help me. I’m aiming for medicine afterwards; I will need it! (Isabella)

Results

- The participants voiced that the bond of trust initiated through concerted action supported the development of their desire to engage in new school, professional or community projects.
- As an example, after the project, Lisa joined the board of a community organization and engaged in a second mural project in her school, inspired by the initial mural project. She acknowledges the benefits of her participation:

At first, I didn't know the people, and I was rather shy, so it was sometimes complicated for me to go to see new people and approach them, but I was super enthusiastic about everything we did, and I included myself in the group more than I thought. The people were very nice — Now I feel more confident to approach new people. Isabelle

- All young people interviewed said that they will mobilize the skills developed within the collective project as part of their studies.
- Three of them were finishing high school at the time of their interviews and had just been accepted for their post-secondary studies,
- They are making direct links between their perseverance in the project and their perseverance in studies, despite the obstacles encountered.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Guidance Services

Several participants indicated they were shy at the beginning and took a “risk” to assert themselves, give their opinion, make presentations of their project

Collective project was a mean to include a diversity of young people to give them a voice

Participants took over the project actions by being supported in a proximal way by facilitators

Challenges and contradictions encountered in the group were used by members as learning opportunities.

Collective project has enabled them to forge links and develop skills that they can mobilize in their educational environment.

Pride is an emotion that is everywhere in their discourses, and the multiplication of opportunities for recognition in various social spaces seems to favor it.

Moreover, the project requires close support from facilitators when social recognition is absent to avoid participant from giving up.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Guidance Services

- In conclusion, the participation in the collective project inspired young people – in a group composed especially of young immigrant women – to commit to meet a need in their community.
- The work of counselors with these young women has led to the mobilization of collective agency and those who have overcome constraints in their collective activity to carry out their artistic project with a transformative aim in the service of other young people (Stetsenko, 2023).
- This project has taken the opportunity to enhance the resources of diversity in a school environment and for immigrant women to voice their perspective in their school and “to be seen or to be known”
- The mural project that they proudly signed, marks the landscape of their school and has since received much positive feedback from school community members.
- The resources they develop become the pillars on which they can build their educational and professional projects





**Thank you for your
attention
Questions?**

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