Health Promotion, "Empowerment" and Education: A Critical Look at the Contributions of Health Reform

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Objectives: This study analyzed health promotion in Canada and discussed the level of contribution empowerment played in the process of health reform.

Methodology: Descriptive analytical.

Results: The author describes the ideology of health promotion in Canada. There are two variants: the behaviorist and socio-environmental. The first favors interventions on individual behavior. The second is built from an explanatory model that targets the search of empowerment of participants and also considers the social-determinants of health. The strategy of the second variant includes the construction of healthy public policies, development of personal skills and the strengthening community action. But these proposals are antagonistic in their application because although their foundation is tied to the progressive, democratic and humanitarian aspects of new social movements, they are at the same time consistent with the values of liberal democracy. Within this framework, the author discusses the empowerment category to analyze the strengths and limitations of the theoretical model of health promotion. For this purpose, there are two variants: psychological and social. These variants differ in the way we understand social participation and the use of "power" in oppressive or liberating ways. In the psychological variant, individuals exert more control over themselves. Its strategies are to strengthen self-esteem, self-adaptation and self help. Its limitation is that it does not always affect the distribution of power and resources in society. The social variant, on other hand, is a process of training individuals and groups. Its objectives are to reduce the oppressive use of power through health education and to increase the autonomy and social responsibility of the individual over their own health. Thus, it seeks to overcome the gap between health professionals and health consumers through a professional practice that redefines the concept of “clinical” and seeks to include people, their experiences and their practices in health care, in addition to combining the social with conventional biomedical practice.

Conclusions: The ideology of health promotion contributes to the promotion of an egalitarian and democratic Canada. Social empowerment of participants redefines educational practices and health care, making them more participatory and liberating.