Beyond Happiness:
Helping teens find meaning through helping others

Au delà du bonheur:
Permettre aux lycéens de trouver du sens en aidant les autres

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Today

• Theoretical basis
• The Maac Program
• Pilot study
• Future directions
Theoretical basis

• Well-being depends on finding meaning and purpose in one’s actions, in addition to experiencing positive emotions (e.g., Seligman, 2013, Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

• Prosocial behavior increases subjective well-being (e.g., Moll et al., 2006, Harbaugh, Mayr, & Burghart, 2007, Dunn et al., 2008).

• Social connection is key factor in psychological and physical wellbeing (e.g., Lieberman, 2015, Reis & Gable, 2003, Schreirer, Schonert-Reichl & Chen, 2013).
The main idea

• How can we apply this research in an educational setting?
  • Allowing students to gain meaning and purpose to their actions
  • Allowing them to help others and feel useful
  • Encouraging social connection
Maac : Massively Accessible Actions for Change

1. Projects that are highly individualized and personal, fun to do and helpful.
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2. A program that is:

   • Step-by-step
   • Accessible and easy-to-use
   • Leading each student from idea generation to action
Some examples

- Nicolas’s legos
- Kevin’s photographs
- Juliette’s library
- Beatrice’s dinners
- Patrick’s bus
- Rose’s letters
- www.maac-lab.com/maacstories
How to make helping easy

• Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985)

• Three fundamental needs:
  • Autonomy
  • Competence
  • Relatedness
Pilot study

- A high-school in Lyon, France
- “Première” = grade 11, students roughly 17 years old
- 30 students in two groups of 15
- 1h every week (or two) for 8 weeks
- Co-led with their teacher
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<td>Planning to Doing, in little steps.</td>
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<td>Séance 8 : Future Steps</td>
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Initial ideas for maacs: What the students thought of doing

- Distributing crepes to homeless people along the main axe of the city center.
- Creating a “wish tree” in the public park in front of the school.
- Giving out care packages to homeless people.
- Putting together “happiness boxes” for hospitalized children.
- Forming a ‘elderly brigade’ to look out and spontaneously help older people cross the street, carry groceries, etc.
Actions for maacs: What the students did

• Spent a morning looking for older people to help as part of an ‘elderly brigade.’

• Distributed some pasta and sandwiches to homeless people.

• Carried out a social experiment involving sharing compliments to groups of friends in the street.
What we’ve learned

• Autonomy
  • intrinsic vs extrinsic motivation
• Sense of powerlessness
• Importance of direct social contact
Present and future directions

• Maac Map
Present and future directions

• Maac Map
Present and future directions

- Maac Map
- Maac Map Manual for teachers and educators
- Interactive website
Conclusion

• Importance of social connection, meaning, and helping.

• Importance of accessibility
  
  • Free maac maps and teacher guides

• Open to collaborations with educators and others
Thank you!

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