

National Collaborating Centre
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A WORKSHOP ON INEQUALITIES USING THE ESCALATORS METAPHOR

PRESENTATION KIT | JANUARY 2011



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sur les politiques publiques et la santé

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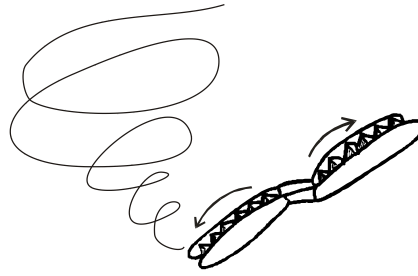
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ABOUT THE NATIONAL COLLABORATING CENTRE FOR HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY

The National Collaborating Centre for Healthy Public Policy (NCCHPP) seeks to increase the expertise of public health actors across Canada in healthy public policy through the development, sharing and use of knowledge. The NCCHPP is one of six Centres financed by the Public Health Agency of Canada. The six Centres form a network across Canada, each hosted by a different institution and each focusing on a specific topic linked to public health. In addition to the Centres' individual contributions, the network of Collaborating Centres provides focal points for the exchange and common production of knowledge relating to these topics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



“In the spiral”

The workshop described in this document is the result of an array of interactions involving the contributions of many actors. It should be considered the fruit of a continually evolving process that is still developing.

This process has so far taken shape mainly within the citizens' network gravitating around the action of the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté* (Collective for a Poverty-Free Québec), with complicity from other actors involved in the fight against poverty in the Rhône-Alpes region in France, and contributions from various workshops, presentations and meetings that have been held over the years, since the escalators metaphor appeared.

In this work of collective intelligence, the following contributions, in particular, can be noted.

- The contribution of the *Carrefour de savoirs sur les besoins essentiels* (Knowledge Forum about Essential Needs), which was established by the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté* (Collective for a Poverty-Free Québec) in the fall of 2003 and which followed through with work until 2005. This think tank was composed of persons living in poverty and members of the *Collectif's* work team. It was during the October 8, 2003 meeting of the *Carrefour de savoirs* that the escalators image was first introduced. The group was composed of the following persons: Jacques Béland, Renaud Blais, Gabrielle Bouthillier, Martine Brassard, Lucienne Cadoret, Danielle Cadorette, Jean Côté, Richard Fecteau, David Huard, Vivian Labrie, Rachel Lacasse, Marie-Anne Paradis-Pelletier, Evelyne Pedneault, Monique Toutant and Gilles Tremblay. The group had a guest that night, Paul Makdissi, who also participated in the conceptual process. In the days that followed, a member of the *Collectif's* team produced an initial drawing, whose basic form was later reproduced in several illustrations.
- The contribution of Emmanuel Bodinier, then with the *Fédération des Centres sociaux* (Social Centres Federation) of the Rhône-Alpes region, in France, and his colleagues at the *Fédération* and in other organizations, notably those present at the *Séminaire international sur les recherches-actions contre l'oppression* (International Seminar on Research-Action Against Oppression) held in Vercheny, in the Drôme, in September 2008, where the co-training technique described in this document was tested.
- The contribution of Marie-France Raynault, physician, professor at the Université de Montréal, and researcher at the Centre Léa-Roback, who recognized the metaphor's potential for the public health community and helped pave the way for the workshop given during the 2008 *Journées annuelles de santé publique* (Québec's annual public health

days) in Québec City. This workshop was designed and co-facilitated in collaboration with her as well as with a small team composed of Sophie Dupéré, Michel O'Neill, and Evelyne Pedneault, the latter having also collaborated with the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté* (Collective for a Poverty-Free Québec) on the recruitment of participants from citizens' networks, actively working with citizens' groups and/or living in poverty.

Vivian Labrie, for her part, has tied the work together over the years, and accumulated experience facilitating and co-facilitating several groups focused on the escalators image, including those mentioned above. She designed and produced this presentation kit, including the text and layout, based on material that has progressively taken shape within this spiral of work.

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1 INTRODUCTION

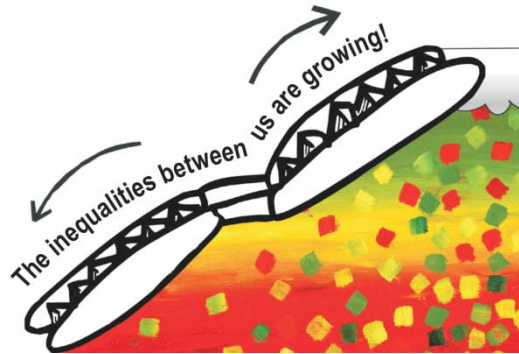


Figure 1 Illustration of the escalators metaphor

In 2003, a group of persons living in poverty compared society to a landing from which one escalator goes up and another escalator goes down. “Poverty,” they essentially told some parliamentarians, “is like having to go up a down escalator. Instead of trying so hard to help us go up escalators that are going down, just fix the escalators.” The reality of our societies is that, in fact, many situations convey mixed messages: on the one hand, efforts are made to help people move up the “steps” while, on the other hand, various rules and actions send them down the “escalators” on which they are standing. Thus, many situations can be identified where people are treated differently depending on their socio-economic situation, to the benefit of those who are already well-off. Over time, all sorts of contradictions build up between programs, policies and budgetary decisions, which prevent the effective reduction of inequalities and, in fact, help reproduce them. To be able to act on these systemic mechanisms, one must first notice them. Since the first appearance of the escalators metaphor, many exploratory and group facilitation activities have demonstrated its potential for raising awareness, particularly in situations where various types of actors are present, including people experiencing the reality of being on a downward escalator.

In order to stimulate exchanges around this metaphor, the NCCHPP presents in collaboration with Vivian Labrie a Presentation Kit for the facilitation of a workshop on inequalities using the escalators metaphor. This kit provides the following basic materials: a facilitator’s guide found in the next sections of this document detailing the experience acquired relative to the “escalators workshop,” a poster template to be reproduced for use during the workshops¹, as well as a series of slides to be shown.²

¹ This poster template that can be enlarged is shown in the appendix of this document. It can be downloaded in PDF format from the following web address: www.ncchpp.ca/docs/escalators_poster_EN.pdf. The 11 x 17 or tabloid format, available on many photocopiers, results in an enlargement that is well suited for working in small groups. To work on a situation in greater detail or in larger groups, a larger format is preferable (photocopy shops that reproduce blueprints are equipped to produce such enlargements for a reasonable price); it is also possible to reproduce the material by hand on large sheets.

² This slide presentation in editable PowerPoint format can be downloaded from www.ncchpp.ca/docs/escalators_PPT_EN.ppt. This presentation contains the comments in Section E of the present document. They can be printed and used to guide the presentation.

The purpose of this facilitator's guide is to share the practical experience in using the escalators metaphor that has been acquired in various contexts and with various groups. It begins by describing the continually evolving nature of this process. Next, some work tools are proposed:

- A one- to two-hour training session to introduce organizers or facilitators to the metaphor's potential and briefly produce some examples;
- The concrete details of a workshop conducted at the *Journées annuelles de santé publique du Québec* (JASP) (Québec's annual public health days) in 2008, which allowed for the sharing and cross-over of knowledge between various actors, including persons living in poverty;
- The accompanying text for a slide presentation of about five minutes that can serve as the introduction to a group workshop; and
- A brief description of a few other contexts in which experimentation with the image of escalators—or stairs—took place.
- For good measure, this “take charge” document ends with an antidogmatic heads-up, recalling both the limits and the potential of the metaphor.

The objectives of this document are essentially very practical. It is to be used as needed. It can be adapted for use in varying contexts, to the issues being addressed, and to the planned scope of an event. The idea is to allow for the exchange of practical knowledge, so that others can also use the fertile concept of social “escalators” to harvest insights which can be applied to their efforts to bring about social transformation that reduces inequalities.

Your comments are welcome. You can forward them to the following email address: ncchpp@inspq.qc.ca. Since all of this represents an evolving spiral of work, enriched by the experiences of one group after another, we would be pleased to hear about your experiences using this metaphor to facilitate discussions, if you should wish to send them. Our thanks.

2 WHY THE ESCALATORS METAPHOR?

Why use this metaphor? Experience has shown its effectiveness for ensuring equal standing during exchanges, allowing different perceptions of reality to emerge, along with potential solutions to problematic situations. Indeed, despite all of the established observations about the systemic causes of social and health inequalities, despite the evidence and the numerous studies, it is very difficult to arrive at substantive collective decisions leading to real improvement in the living conditions of society's poorest members. Those who try regularly make the same painful observation: between the recognition of problems and the implementation of coherent solutions, one encounters sophisticated forms of denial and resistance that are far from rational. Acting on the causes of an inegalitarian system that tends to reproduce itself presupposes reconsidering the functional dynamics that are necessarily tied to the relative positions of different groups of people. Reducing these inequalities means calling into question the pervasive degree of tolerance for them and, at the same time, developing a win-win relationship in an effort to construct greater de facto equality. In an interdependent system, everyone must move. Therein lies one of the difficulties in effecting change: how to provoke this movement.

Since we only move by moving, for change to occur, we must be able to generate opportunities for raising awareness about the system dynamics that cause poverty. This must be done right down to public decisions that contravene the principle of equal rights, and that systematically undermine the dignity of certain persons and categories of persons and effectively prevent them from achieving the human rights recognized in international charters. Moreover, nothing is more convincing of the beneficial nature of the necessary changes than personally experiencing the positive dynamic that can occur when people of different social status reflect together in the equality of a shared moment. Preconceived notions break down. What happens then is priceless. Experience has shown that, like the desire for equality, the desire for knowledge-building with others increases with use!

In brief, at issue is the need to create knowledge-sharing opportunities for persons with different perspectives and social statuses, to advance both knowledge and action. Until we recognize ourselves as an "us," as members of a single society who are as much a part of the problem as of potential solutions, it is difficult to concretely address inequalities. How can we help a group, organization, or committee that desires to do so focus attention on the inequalities that pervade their reality and about which no one speaks? What will help us to see, and to see that we have seen? How is it possible to develop, explain and convey a vision and goals concerning the changes that are needed?

The escalators metaphor provides a good tool for confronting the uncomfortable reality of differences in status, recognition, and quality of life that exist in "real life." By shifting attention to an image for which a group then tries to find analogues in reality, this metaphor provides an acceptable pretext for 1) freeing people to speak, 2) talking about processes, and 3) modelling situations.

Far from closing the debate on inequalities, it opens it up by pulling back from a tight focus on the steps people must [be helped to] climb, which too often limits the horizon of proposed solutions for combatting poverty. It re-focuses attention on the interdependent systems that

regenerate and perpetuate inequalities even as people are endeavouring to escape them. It does not provide easy answers or solutions and does not dictate the tenor of the discussion. It simply opens a “panoramic” perspective on a complex process that one can lose sight of when too much attention is focused on changing the behaviour of the persons who endure the consequences of inequalities that are very often produced by forces outside their control. Concentrating on the steps that must be climbed is a little like acting as if practising playing musical chairs will help you keep your place in the world... when, after every turn, a chair is removed. By highlighting the role of external mechanisms, which a priori lie outside the control of those who are losing at the game of inequalities, the escalators metaphor addresses the longstanding demand of citizens’ organizations that attention be focused on the systemic causes of poverty and the actors associated with them. And it can help to reframe the problem and many of its terms: poverty, inequality, exclusion, thresholds, equality, wealth, tiers, paradoxes, contradictions.

If, in addition, care is taken to involve persons of diverse social status, including persons living in poverty and marginalized and socially excluded persons, in the reflective process, one can ensure that the issues raised are viewed from a variety of perspectives. Thus, blind spots can be illuminated—those aspects of reality that are not visible from another’s relative position in society. In doing so, occasions are also indirectly provided for persons living in difficult or desperate situations to empower themselves and have some impact.

The essence of what is to be shared here can ultimately be boiled down to a single question, reflective of the exploratory spirit of this work, resolutely open to new experiences: what is the potential usefulness of an activity that involves gathering several individuals together to explore this strong image and what form can such an activity take? There is no fixed answer. The exploration has been ongoing for several years, encountering the expected and the unexpected. The activities related to this image are continually adapted to specific contexts.

Neither simplistic, nor complex, the escalators metaphor can be described as “simplex”³. This makes it very interesting as a shared reference: it evokes an overall conceptual representation that is at once simple to visualize and complex in its signification. It can be meaningful on various levels: allusion, citation, argument, comparison, group facilitation, illustration, systematic work. Nor is special equipment required: contemplation of what the metaphor evokes is sufficient to stimulate discussion and exploration of its referential universe, in large or small groups.

Thus, one must be clear from the outset that there is no preferred way of using or working with the metaphor. For some readers of this document, a simple reference to the image and its context of origin as an introduction may suffice. Do you perhaps already have some idea of how to make use of it in your own context? In that case, go ahead! That being said, with time and over the course of a number of experiments, a kind of standard workshop has taken shape, “the escalators workshop.”

³ The meaning and the scope of this expression were developed by Berthoz (2009) in *La simplicité*.

3 THE HEART OF THE WORKSHOP

This workshop basically builds from an adaptable concept and a poster.

The standard workshop can be described as follows:

- Identify**
- together
- with persons living in poverty, experiencing inequality and exclusion,
- through the contribution of various kinds of expertise (that of persons experiencing such situations, intervention workers, administrators, decision makers, elected officials, researchers),
- one or more situations that [potentially] reveal inequalities.
- Explore** the situations in question
- using the escalators image
- and **illustrate**
- in graphic form
- what can be observed and learned
- about them
- and about the escalators image
- by thus transposing and modelling the situations.
- Seek answers** to questions
- that allow these observations to be **transposed back**
- into reality
- and into the fields of activity
- of the persons present.
- State what this teaches us**
- about how to **think differently**
- and **act concretely**,
- and in particular, how not to be satisfied with climbing [making people climb] the steps
- and how to act on the escalators
- or even get off them.

This description can be seen as a checklist. Depending on the case, one aspect or another can be emphasized. Let's draw attention, among other things, to the convergence of two complementary motivations: to explore the image and to facilitate the encounter of expertise, including that of persons who are often excluded from places where "thinking leading to decisions" takes place. The image can be explored at any time. However, it is somewhat necessary, and always beneficial, to bring together people with a variety of relevant expertise and to insist that persons experiencing the inequalities being discussed participate in the workshop. In certain cases, the process has been carefully planned. In others, the invitations have encouraged the attendance of a diverse group. In still others, the workshop has been

carried out with persons living in poverty, but without the sharing and cross-over of other forms of expertise related to the situations discussed.

This type of activity can help raise awareness, reveal situations, and lead to realizations. It has so far been very useful in these regards. It can lead to action: concrete ways of addressing a situation are proposed and the means to implement them are identified. It can also undoubtedly plant the seeds for future action: one cannot know in advance what the practical implications will be, but situations will eventually arise, in the near or distant future, where the new understanding of situations thus acquired will be extended or applied. The knowledge gained will be applicable either to situations or to mechanisms of inequality. Knowledge about both life and the model—in other words, practical and theoretical knowledge—will be acquired. This is why it is also worthwhile to record people's observations, as they continue to enrich the model.

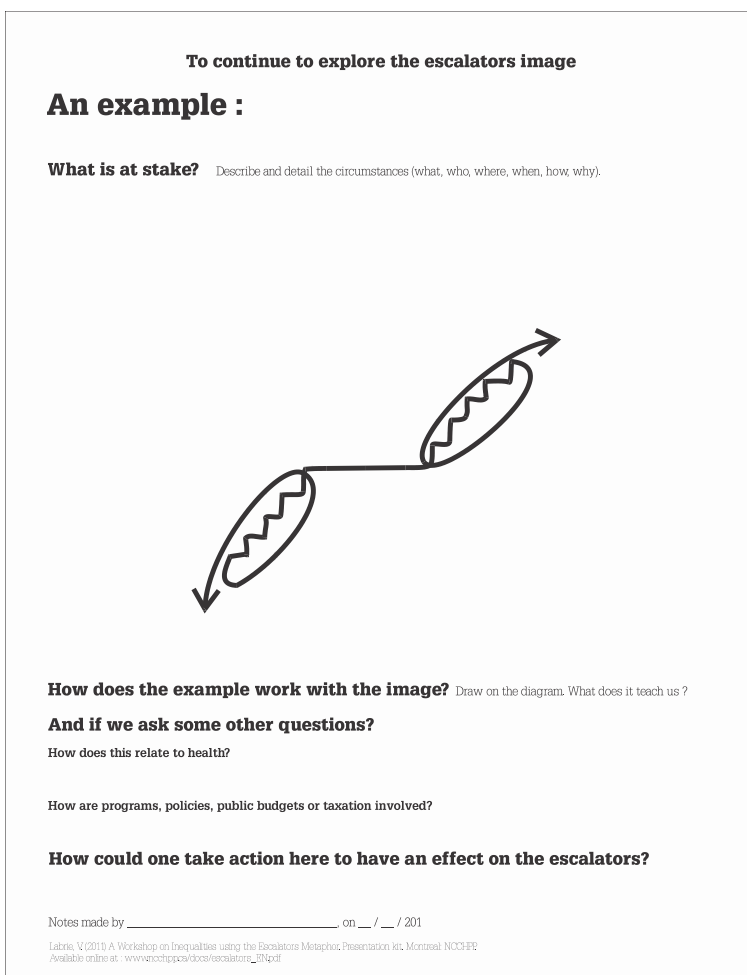


Figure 2 The standard poster provided with this kit

Experience has demonstrated the importance of providing a visual reference for working on and modelling situations. The poster in Figure 2, presented in the appendix and available online at the following address, www.ncchpp.ca/docs/escalators_poster_EN.pdf, has been well suited to the contexts of the workshops conducted so far.

In the same vein, it is worth stressing the importance of being well prepared to facilitate the workshop and creating an agreeable, friendly, and welcoming environment where those present can feel relaxed and free to participate. These few suggestions are often all that is required to design an “escalators workshop” suitable to the context and needs.



Figure 3 **Dramatization**

People decide to dramatize some thoughts suggested to them by the escalators image, introduced verbally during a debate about the causes of poverty.

Source: *Marche contre la pauvreté et pour la dignité* (Walk Against Poverty and For Dignity), Lyon (France), July 2, 2010.



Figure 4 **Modelling**

At the end of this debate, a participant spontaneously gets up to illustrate his reflections on the blackboard, using the escalators image.

Source: *Marche contre la pauvreté et pour la dignité* (Walk Against Poverty and For Dignity), Lyon (France), July 2, 2010.

Taking it a step further, the best way to become familiar with the subject, and also to prepare to facilitate a workshop, is without a doubt to undergo the experience of exploring the image with several people. The training activity in the following section is an effective means of introducing a group to the metaphor's potential and to the difficulties that might be encountered when facilitating a workshop. It can prove very useful to a working group that then wishes to develop an activity that makes use of this image.

4 AN HOUR-LONG CO-TRAINING ACTIVITY TO BECOME FAMILIAR WITH THE METAPHOR AND PREPARE TO FACILITATE ACTIVITIES BASED ON IT

The flash training session proposed here is inspired by an exploratory activity, which served as a pre-test for the JASP process, and which took place in September 2008 in Vercheny, France, with participants from France and from several African countries. The seminar in Vercheny brought together about twenty people, for three days, who worked in various fields and wished to share expertise on how to integrate research, group facilitation and action in processes aimed at enabling people to take action together to combat oppression. The workshop was organized in an ad hoc manner with just a few hours' notice, to provide those present with hands-on experience on that very occasion.

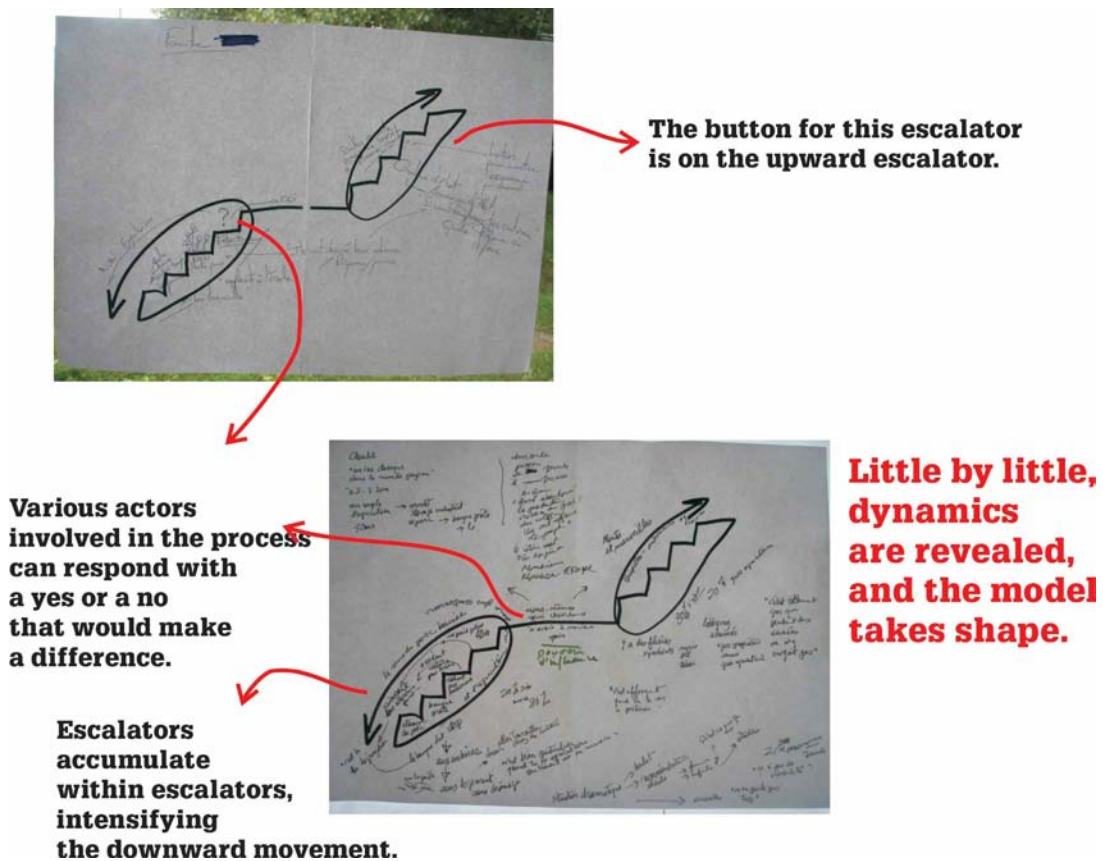


Figure 5 Diagramming exercise

The potential of working with the image is tested in small groups. In each group, people propose examples of escalator situations and try to diagram these situations and the dynamics they reveal. It works.

Source: *Séminaire international sur les recherches-actions contre l'oppression* (International Seminar on Research-Action Against Oppression), Vercheny (France), September 2008.

The proposed activity lasts about one hour, not including to the time taken to present and summarize the activity. It allows for each member of the group to experience assuming the task of describing a situation, of listening and observing, of leading the group and of making notes using the escalators image.

The process is as follows: after a brief introduction to the image, groups of four are formed. Each group works for one hour, observing four fifteen-minute rotations, during each of which:

- one person describes an actual situation that may be related in some way to the escalators image;
- one person leads the small group, the goal being to discover together how this situation can be described and represented on the escalators;
- one person notes what is said on the poster with the escalators image and tries, if possible, to illustrate the shared observations on the escalators image, relying, as needed, on the group's ideas and suggestions; and
- a fourth person listens and assumes the role of "participant."

The aim here is not to perform an in-depth study, but to see the image's potential. After an hour, each small group will have produced four annotated posters, and each person will have experienced each role. Each of the posters produced can then be exhibited to the whole group, which ends up with as many posters as there are people present, or in other words, a sample set of as many problematic situations. This workshop demonstrates how the image functions as a means of revealing and representing situations of inequality in highly diverse contexts.

At the Vercheny workshop, after completing this exercise and viewing the posters displayed on the walls, two questions were addressed to the group in a plenary session:

- Does the image work? What does it contribute?
- Could we use this image or a similar one to work with people with whom we would like to collaborate on action-research projects?⁴

In response, some African participants sought potential equivalents to the escalators image in their own culture and suggested an image of fruit damaged by a tree disease. The question of equivalent metaphors, glimpsed on this occasion, remains open.

After carrying out such an activity, a working group may be in a position to assess the image's potential, to review the observed limitations of each role (namely, describing a real-life situation, leading a group, noting observations, and being a "participant"), and to make choices suitable to their context and needs when organizing a more formal activity around this metaphor. It is also possible that the type of activity described above will suffice to meet the needs of a group if, for example, the main point is to familiarize people with the metaphor and its potential.

Sometimes, however, an example or a model is desired, either for inspiration or simple reproduction. The following section presents in detail the workshop carried out in Québec City, during the 2008 JASP, including a description, objectives, the agenda, and a logistical "checklist."

⁴ Or various processes tied to a "see, judge, act" approach.

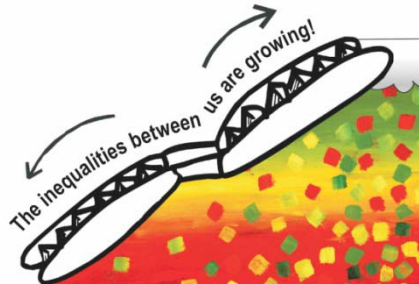
5 THE WORKSHOP PRESENTED AT THE 2008 JASP *ENDURING POVERTY: SEEKING CONSISTENT ACTIONS OR HOW TO MAKE DOWNWARD ESCALATORS GO UP*⁵

This workshop on “enduring poverty” took place during an international event associated with the 2008 JASP, namely the *Rencontre francophone internationale sur les inégalités sociales de santé (RFIISS)* (International Francophone meeting on social inequalities in health), held in Québec City, on November 18, 2008, between 10:30 a.m. and 12 p.m. There were about 70 participants, including about 40 convention attendees (researchers, students, health professionals) from Québec and elsewhere, about 20 people from the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté* (Collective for a Poverty-Free Québec) network (persons living in poverty and/or persons active in citizens’ groups). This also included a team of six responsible for leading small work groups and two workshop leaders, Marie-France Raynault, a physician and researcher at the Centre Léa-Roback in Montréal, and Vivian Labrie. An international guest, who arrived from Rwanda, acted as a kind of cultural mirror, reflecting on the relationship between situations of inequality here and in Rwanda.

The format adopted for the workshop consisted of an introductory presentation for all the participants, followed by group work around each table and a plenary session—a format that would be easy to apply and adapt to larger groups, or alternatively, to smaller ones. The difference would be in the number of tables. With a very small group, of say 5 to 15 persons, one may choose to work with the entire group throughout.

5.1 WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Conference attendees were provided with the following description of the workshop.



**Illustration of the
escalators metaphor**
(*Repetition of Figure 1*)

Regularly confronted with the detrimental effects of poverty on people’s health, public health actors often feel helpless when it comes time to intervene. Attention has been drawn to the risk of increasing health inequalities by implementing programs that exclude, in one way or another, those at the bottom of the social ladder. It is also important to understand the public policy context surrounding programs and how to increase consistency among interventions.

⁵ Translation of the original title in French: *La pauvreté qui dure : à la recherche d’actions cohérentes ou comment faire monter les escaliers qui descendent.*

In 2003, a group of persons living in poverty compared society to a landing from which one escalator goes up and another escalator goes down. "Poverty," they said, is like having to go up a down escalator. Instead of trying so hard to help us go up escalators that are going down, just fix the escalators. "The reality in Québec is that many situations convey mixed messages, with programs intended to help, on the one hand, and harmful policies and budget decisions on the other. Does this metaphor work in other national contexts? What can be done to integrate the messages sent by policies, budgets, and programs, thereby reducing inequalities and poverty?"

This workshop is intended for public health professionals and intervention workers, and for students and researchers from Québec and elsewhere. Its overall objective is to raise awareness about the experience of persons living in poverty and about the inconsistencies among programs that target them. The idea of the workshop is to creatively stimulate the sharing and cross-over of participants' knowledge (those who develop programs and policies, those who experience them, and those who implement them).

At the end of the workshop, participants will have acquired a better understanding of the field, which will ensure more consistent and effective action.

5.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

Three objectives were pursued more specifically:

- Verify the relevance, in various public health related contexts, of a metaphor introduced by persons living in poverty and facilitate the use of this metaphor to address inconsistencies among policies and programs;
- Take part in an experience involving the sharing and cross-over of knowledge between public health actors and researchers and persons, whether living in poverty or not, associated with a citizens' movement combatting poverty; and
- Progress from observations about the experiences and behaviour of persons "on the lower escalator" to suggestions for acting on the social environments generating the inequalities that impede the efforts of such persons to escape their situation.

5.3 FACILITATION TEAM

In the weeks prior to the workshop, once the subject had been determined, a small preparatory team interested in the experiment worked out the details of the content and method to be used. This team also located and recruited persons with experience working with groups who could ensure a facilitation style that would be equally suitable for conference attendees, for persons living in poverty, and for other stakeholders invited to share their knowledge and experience. A few days before the workshop, these facilitators were brought together for a preparatory meeting of about an hour.

5.4 RECRUITMENT AND PLACEMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

The recruitment of conference attendees was integrated with the general registration process for the meeting.

The issue here was to find a way to ensure the presence of persons living in poverty and of others who actively work with them. To this end, the organization team approached the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté* in Québec City, who assisted with locating such people and forwarded the invitation to its network. The individuals initially located were contacted by the preparatory committee, who were careful to ensure that they would be sufficient in number for a true sharing and cross-over of experience to occur. These individuals, who did not participate in the rest of the conference, were invited, on the morning of the workshop, to attend a preparatory session one hour before the activity began, during which the facilitators familiarized them with the context of the workshop and its content. They were divided up among the tables, with two or three at each table.

The room contained tables that seat ten (circles of chairs would also have worked). Each table was identified by a number and equipped with a flip chart and materials that would be useful for the workshop. The facilitators welcomed the conference attendees. To ensure a good mix, upon entering the room, the attendees were given a number randomly assigning them to a specific table.

5.5 THE AGENDA

The intent while welcoming people was to create a warm, relaxed atmosphere. Once everyone was settled, the activity progressed according to the following agenda.

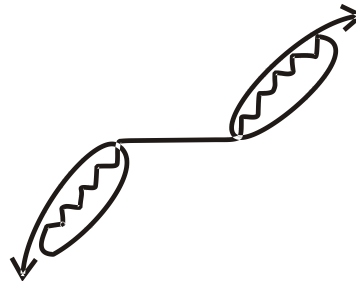


Figure 6 Schematic illustration used as a reference for work in small groups

First step: Introductory presentation, with all participants (15 minutes)

- Introduction to the workshop and its goal. (3–5 minutes)
- Slideshow presentation introducing the escalators metaphor, the 2003 declaration to parliamentarians, *Le droit de nos droits* (the right to our rights) (www.pauvrete.qc.ca/IMG/pdf/Decl_dej_parl_031023.pdf), which first introduced the metaphor, and a few examples from Québec illustrating the metaphor. (5 minutes)
- Description of the process to be followed by each small group. (3 minutes)

Second step: Workshopping in small groups (40 minutes)

- Each table is equipped with a flip chart holding several posters containing the escalators image, and a hat, which will be circulated during the introductions.

- The facilitators at the tables initiate the activity.
- Participants introduce themselves using the “hat” method: “My name is...” “I have come to this workshop wearing my ... hat, because...” “I will leave satisfied if...”. (5 minutes)
- Participants are invited to brainstorm a number of examples of personal or collective situations they have experienced or observed that can be related to the escalators metaphor. It is important to make sure that the persons living in poverty and other representatives of the citizens’ movement express themselves. (15 minutes)
- A situation is chosen from among those brought up.
- For this situation, the group sketches the story on the escalators image, clearly showing which aspects “move up” and which “move down.” The group then asks itself the following questions, recording the answers in the spaces indicated on the poster: How does this relate to health? How are programs, policies, public budgets, or taxation involved? How could one, in this situation, take action to affect the escalators? (20 minutes)
- The group facilitators draw attention to fruitful ideas and concepts that may emerge.
- The international guest circulates among the tables, listening and then responding, by making connections between what is described and situations in her own country.

Third step: Collective review and discussion (35 minutes)

- The posters are displayed at the front of the room.
- The facilitators of the small groups briefly present a situation that was examined, explaining what was learned, particularly with respect to “taking action to affect the escalators.” (10 minutes)
- The group is asked a question: What does this exercise teach us and how can we use this metaphor to support future public health action? (10 minutes)
- Response and presentation of similar examples from an international context, now or at the end in conclusion. (10 minutes)
- Concluding remarks from a “public health” perspective. (5 minutes)
- Brief evaluation.
- Those interested in receiving a report on the workshop are invited to leave their email addresses at the exit.

5.6 LOGISTICAL ASPECTS

Room and room arrangement

- A room that can hold 80 people working in groups of 10, at eight tables with 10 chairs each;
- A table at the front for presentations and group facilitation;
- Availability of a projector.

Material needed

- Digital projector;
- Slide presentation on the escalators;
- One flip chart per group of 10;
- A microphone;
- “Escalators” posters;
- Copies of the 2003 declaration *Le droit de nos droits* (The Right to our Rights) for everyone;
- Felt markers;
- One worksheet per participant (the poster, in 11 x 17 format);
- A document recording the results of the process and making it possible to later repeat the activity;
- Hats and strips of paper for the activity where participants introduce themselves;
- Numbered cardboard stands and tags for tables and participants.

5.7 RESULTS

Even though the goal here is not to compile the results of the workshop, but rather to present the workshop method, these results proved rich, in terms of both content and form. Some of the issues raised were social assistance conditions; collective kitchens, which are poorly supported even though they make a huge difference; highways that divide poor neighbourhoods, while increasing the pace of life for people in wealthy neighbourhoods; six-month employability programs that drop people back down onto the lower escalator once they are over; schools that are poorly adapted to the reality of teenage pregnancy, which leads to dropping out, even though it would be possible to adapt school facilities; and contradictory messages conveyed by cuts to employment assistance measures. The levels of surprise and increased awareness that participants experienced led them to talk about the workshop to others and to express a desire to repeat it in their own environment. The workshop was fruitful in several other ways as well. There was confirmation that the image works in other national contexts. Intuitions and realizations were sparked. Contacts were established. There were requests to include the image in publications referring to the *Journées internationales*. The metaphor gave rise to new conceptual constructs. Afterwards, the escalators image continued its journey... on to a conference of the Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada (CDPAC). The latter took place in Ottawa the week following the workshop. Strengthened by the success of the workshop that had just taken place, the escalators image was again suggested as a point of reference to conference attendees, this time during a plenary session on the subject of “acting to eliminate poverty.” And so on.

6 A SLIDE PRESENTATION AND ITS ACCOMPANYING TEXT

The following text contains the comments suggested by Vivian Labrie for each of the slides of the PowerPoint presentation. Those comments have been slightly adapted for more general use from the slide presentation given by the author at the beginning of the 2008 JASP.

Presented without interruption, this version can last from five to ten minutes. If interaction with the group takes place, the duration of the presentation will vary accordingly. These comments are provided as an example. The examples used within the text were adapted to the context of Québec in the fall of 2008. They can, of course, be replaced to good effect with examples more suitable to the context at hand. A section headed “Another round of examples” at the end of the file brings into play additional ideas, of a more general order. The file, in editable PowerPoint format, can be downloaded from www.ncchpp.ca/docs/escalators_PPT_EN.ppt.

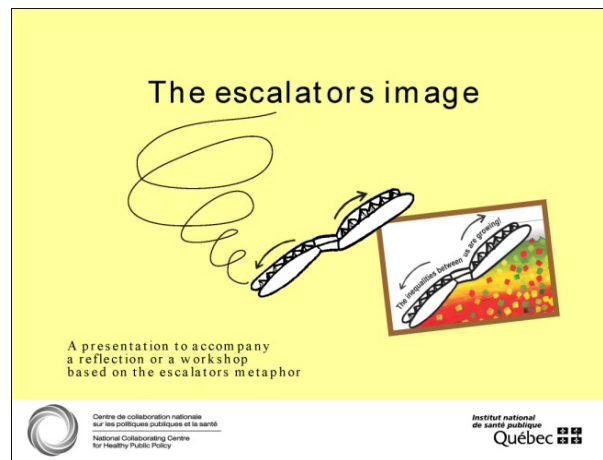


Figure 7 The PowerPoint presentation

Slide 1

Hello everyone! I'd like to introduce you to the escalators image. This will be a brief introduction, just to allow you to work with this image. If you are interested, there are other texts that discuss the image at greater length and in more detail.

The escalators image grew out of a citizens' movement that had been ongoing for several years and had been frustrated in its efforts to bring about transformative change by problems related to poverty, exclusion and inequality that were, in fact, produced by the very systems through which society functions.

Very often, public discourse, as well as various policy and project decisions, focuses on the behaviour of persons struggling with poverty and exclusion, and holding the short end of the stick when it comes to inequality. We try to offer such individuals, who are viewed as disadvantaged, the means to improve their situation through employment, support or education programs. This help is often short-term. It is often accompanied by prejudice, by the belief that “you can if you want to,” and a sprinkling of individual examples. One can sometimes sense behind this discourse a certain fear of encouraging laziness or

abuses, also illustrated by typical, meaning stereotypical, examples. So it's the same old carrot and stick strategy. This relies on the observed resilience of some people and the supposed delinquency of others. It does not call into question the way society functions.

Within the citizens' movement in Québec, since the 1970s, there has been a search for approaches that act on the "external" causes of the problem, on dimensions of the "macrosystem"—in short, on the part of the problem for which poor, excluded persons, affected by inequalities, are not directly responsible. In other words, if we improve the taxation system, budget decisions, social policy, and the economic system, if we try to ensure greater equality and solidarity, if we pull together in the same direction guided by the same collective values, can we not proportionately reduce the poverty, inequalities, and exclusion endured by some people and communities, whose desire to escape these could be considered evident? Still more specifically, should the priority not be to fight, fix, and prevent public decisions that generate more poverty, inequality, and exclusion?

Slide 2

All this started with ladders, or scales, as in a vertical progression of steps. We use these terms a lot in society: the social ladder, salary scales, skills scales.

Slide 3

This image, for example, was used by the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté* (Collective for a Poverty-Free Québec) to represent the point of impact of various budget decisions.

Slide 4

In 2002, following years of citizen advocacy, the National Assembly of Québec adopted the *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion*. In 2003, the *Collectif* worked hard to ensure its proper application. One of the key issues concerned the meeting of essential needs. So, together with persons living in poverty, the *Collectif* set up a "knowledge forum" about essential needs (*Carrefour de savoirs sur les besoins essentiels*). During the first few weeks, the image of the social ladder came up frequently.

Slide 5

One night, someone said it wasn't just a question of a ladder. In fact, she said, our society is more like a landing from which one escalator goes up and another goes down. Poverty is like being at the bottom of a downward escalator and being told "Come on, go up!" by people standing on the upward escalator. The group immediately saw the relevance of this image. One after another, people built on the idea, continuing to explore the explanatory model that was taking shape before their eyes, considering it and providing various examples.

A week later, a delegation of persons living in poverty presented the image to parliamentarians in the National Assembly, telling them in essence: "Instead of trying so hard to help us go up escalators that are moving down, just fix the escalators."

Slide 6

This image later proved very useful in showing up inconsistencies in the system stemming from the contradictory influences of policies, programs, budgets, laws, and projects, some of which cause social gaps to widen, while others are trying to reduce

them. Perhaps you can already think of examples that apply to your own context. I'm going to give you three from among many.

Slide 7

My first example is budgetary. I won't go into detail.⁶ Let's simply say that since 2003, despite a law mandating the improvement of living conditions for all persons living in poverty and the reduction of inequalities, the cumulative effect of budgetary decisions made in Québec has been to further impoverish the poorest, through cuts in social protections, and to widen gaps, in particular through tax cuts that have accelerated the up escalator for the wealthy. There were some interesting measures for families, but from 2005 to 2008 inclusively, the government, with full awareness, reduced the purchasing power of social assistance recipients considered capable of working, by indexing their benefits by only half the increase in the cost of living. This decision sent the lower escalator down faster than local efforts could be made to help people climb the steps. To give you an idea of the size of the impact, in 2006, in order to compensate for the additional deprivation brought about by semi-indexation that year, it would have taken more than 40 fundraisers like the one led by the Montréal media before Christmas for those living in poverty.

Slide 8

Subsequently, in 2008, just before calling an election, the government announced the full indexation of the benefits in question. After a lot of pressure from citizens and institutions, this was good news, even though it did not erase all the accumulated damage. The effects of this decision can be illustrated using the model. It acts on the escalators by eliminating a systemic effect, which is seemingly minimal, but which "systematically" moves the lower escalator down.

In the same way, budgetary decisions can be examined from year to year, right up to this year's budget, to determine their impact on the escalators. This is particularly relevant now, in light of the pressure being exerted on the government by the recent economic crisis: will the impact of this crisis be to speed up or to reverse the movement of the escalators?

Slide 9

My second example is political, and relates to influence games. In 2006, the minister of health and social services in Québec was faced with two "17 million dollar" questions. In one case, this was the sum demanded by a citizens' campaign, claiming the sum represented the remaining cost of re-establishing free access to prescription drugs for social assistance recipients. This right had been lost in 1997. It had not yet been recovered for beneficiaries whose ability to work was not considered to be severely limited. In the other case, this was the amount spent by medical specialists on a highly mediatized public campaign aimed at increasing their salaries, already among the highest

⁶ For a detailed analysis of Québec's budgets from 1998 to 2008 and of the 2008-2009 budget in particular, please refer to the following document: Labrie, V. (2008a). *La loi du plus fort et les mises à l'écart. Les budgets du Québec accumulés. L'art et l'air de rien dans le budget du Québec 2008-2009. Québec: Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté.* This text can be downloaded from www.pauvrete.qc.ca/IMG/pdf/090225- Les_budgets_du_Qubec_accumules-Budget_2008-2009-Article_de_fond-ok.pdf. It is accompanied by a technical analysis (Labrie, 2008b), which can also be downloaded from www.pauvrete.qc.ca/IMG/pdf/080704- Analyse_detaillee_du_budget_2008-2009_et_comparaisons_depuis1998.pdf. These documents incorporate the escalators metaphor into their analyses.

in Québec society, by several hundred million dollars. The medical specialists won their cause within the year. The requested reinstatement for the poorest citizens was obtained one year later after ten years and much struggle on the part of citizens.⁷

Slide 10

My third example may seem like an isolated case, but it relates to what might be called the economic unconscious. This example was related by a participant in the fall of 2008. Street kids receive imposing fines for loitering and other minor offences that can lead to debts of \$5000, \$6000 or even more. Almost a student debt... but without the studies! This situation weighs a great deal on all their efforts when they start to work. The lower escalator goes down. Questioned about this practice of collecting revenues by taxing penniless youth, a mayor replied that, in any case, the municipality funded an organization working with street kids. The organization in question does good work helping these kids to move up a step, but this does not compensate for the escalator speeding them towards the bottom, fuelled by the city's revenue collection policy. While pretending to help, the mayor is, in effect, saying: "I'll help you, me neither!" He is "building dead ends." The revenue policy is inconsistent with the objective of fighting poverty and contributes instead to fighting the poor.

Slide 11

In a few minutes, you will be invited to play with this image yourselves, by evoking situations to which you think it would apply. [A special effort has been made to allow you to carry out this activity in a dialogue with persons living in poverty or actively working with them.] The suggested process allows time for brainstorming. Next, you will choose an example which you will explore in more detail using the poster, examining how the escalators dynamic applies to this example, how it relates to health, how policies, programs, laws, budgets, and projects are involved, and how one could take action to affect the escalators. Then, in 40 minutes' time, we will share our experiences and see what has been learned.

Slide 12

The activity has a dual objective that we deem realistic: firstly, to give you an opportunity to explore the potential of an image, which was produced by persons living in poverty, in order to reveal the systemic aspects of various situations and lead to appropriate action; and secondly, to create an opportunity for knowledge-sharing and -building among persons concerned with the issue of inequalities. Since it is said that pleasure and desire grow with use, this is a concrete way to facilitate the transfer of these assets of citizen action in the area of social theory and method. In other words, if this workshop makes it possible, in the future, for you to apply this image, or the type of approach that led to its emergence, to the resolution of problematic situations you encounter in your activities, then we will have achieved our goal.

⁷ To review this episode from the perspective of the citizens' campaign, please see the documents published on the website of the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté* (2006a), at www.pauvrete.qc.ca/article.php3?id_article=368. The demand of the *Collectif* was supported by a letter signed by some one hundred persons employed in various positions within the health and social services network (*Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté*, 2006b). Their letter of support can be read at the following web address: www.pauvrete.qc.ca/IMG/pdf/Campagne_sur_les_medicaments-lettre_d_appui.pdf. For a discussion highlighting the two 17-million-dollar questions, please refer, in particular, to issue 235 (May 31, 2006) of *Soupe au caillou*, the *Collectif's* newsletter (2006c), at www.pauvrete.qc.ca/IMG/pdf/Soupe_au_pilules_-235-5_jours.pdf.

Slide 13

This type of exercise has the additional advantage of allowing the ongoing collective examination of dynamics and theoretical issues. These dynamics and issues are made visible as examples are given and relationships are drawn. This is why it is useful to explore the metaphor freely, including with diagrams. Just to cite an example, during the workshop carried out in Vercheny, France, participants considering the issue of housing recognized that intervention workers can choose to help a family up to the landing or to send them back down the downward escalator. Another observation: in this situation, the 'button' for the downward escalator was on the upward escalator. Another team examined how a farm family had lost its farm by increasing its debt load so as to increase its production of pork, as it had been advised to do. The analysis of the situation showed the chain of personal and structural factors, including the drop in pork prices, that had propelled this household downwards, although it was trying to improve its situation, while at the same time, subsidy policies in the European Union did more to ease the way for large producers. This team also brought up the potential impact of the empowerment that comes from consumer choices.

In short, it is certain that today we will benefit from your expertise, from the sharing of your experience, from your intuitions and from the relationships that will be drawn through these exchanges.

Slide 14

On this note, we wish to thank you. And now, it's your turn!

Here also are the replacement texts for slides 7 to 10, for the round of additional examples included at the end of the slide presentation file.

Slide 7'

My first example concerns the relationships between large population groups. It is worth becoming familiar with the broad details of income distribution in our society. I won't go into great detail. Let's see if together we can answer the following questions. Who makes up the poorest one fifth of the population in our community? What is the average income in this group for a single person and for a family? Is their situation improving or deteriorating? What is the annual income of a person whose sole income comes from social assistance benefits? Whose income is based on minimum wage? Are these incomes sufficient to meet essential needs? To escape from poverty? Now let's consider the long-term trend at the other end of the system of escalators. According to the data of Atkinson and Piketty (2007), over the course of the last century, the incomes of the wealthiest one thousandth of the population in our societies have followed a U curve. Whereas they accounted for 4.5 to 8% of total income in the 1920s and 1930s, this proportion decreased to between 2 and 3% of total income, which is still a lot, during the thirty years following the Second World War, referred to as "the glorious thirty" because of the prosperity and social advancement that flourished at that time. Starting in the 1980s, this wealthiest thousandth of the population began to regain the portion of income it had lost since the 1920s and 1930s. By 2000, it was a fait accompli. Although they are not shown in this graph, the subsequent years followed the same trend. On its highest steps, the upward escalator is rising even faster. This phenomenon can be referred to as the reconcentration of wealth.

Slide 8'

We might ask ourselves now what impact this reconcentration of wealth has had on public policy. What we can see is that the 1980s signalled an intensification of pressure to “clean up” public finances in our governments, which had been obliged to take on debt to maintain spending levels during a period of economic crisis. Since interest rates were very high at that time, they contracted debts that took on significant proportions. These debts were then used to argue in favour of imposing drastic zero-deficit policies, and reducing social spending. The 1980s and 1990s were accompanied by significant reductions in the level of coverage ensured by basic social safety nets. Further erosion of fiscal solidarity continued into the 2000s, ushering in significant tax cuts, which, in turn, paved the way for budget deficits, which led to strategies for reducing public spending and decreasing the size of government. Do we know of any examples where this trend was successfully countered? By what and by whom? What role did the economic crisis at the end of the 2000s play in this scenario? What would be required to simply recover a portion of the income of the wealthiest one thousandth of the population that would be comparable to the portion collected during “the glorious thirty” and to improve the coverage of essential needs in our society?

Slide 9'

My second example invites a review of the way credit and debt mechanisms function in relation to the escalators. The example is a general one and we can find many illustrations in various specific environments. Indebtedness is an old fortune maker... and unmaker—and one which has enslaved a great number of people. If one has more money than necessary, one can lend it and “make money from money” by charging interest on the amount loaned. If one needs money and borrows some, it will cost more than the amount borrowed, and sometimes so much more that it becomes impossible to repay it and to free oneself of the debt. Thus it becomes a chronic debt for some and a form of regular taxation for others. The poorer one is, the higher interest rates are, to the point where, at a certain level, it becomes usurious and is accompanied by threats to one’s physical well-being. The same principle holds true for individuals and states. Indebtedness was the first example that was brought up when the escalators metaphor was introduced to a group of single mothers heading families. And for us now, does it relate to concrete situations? Which ones?

Slide 10'

My third example invites an exploration of the role played by the school system. Education frequently comes up during public discourse as a prime strategy for combatting poverty. That being said, one must take into account the different economic, social, and cultural circumstances of families: depending on the case, these families can be situated at different levels on the escalators. Given these differences, what role does the school system play in our social environment? Does it affect the escalators? In what sense? What place should we assign to it in this dynamic? Does it contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities or to their reduction? Can we find examples?

7 OTHER WORKSHOP EXPERIENCES INVOLVING ESCALATORS, OR EVEN STAIRCASES!

In the case of the JASP workshop, the aim was not so much to carry out a systematic theoretical exploration as to place public health actors in contact with a method, a powerful image... and with people! It shows that such meetings are possible, even in a context as formal as that of a conference. Other experiences took on different aspects. Below are a few examples.

7.1 A WORKSHOP FOR COLLECTIVE SOCIAL THEORIZING

In August of 2007, the first systematic exploration of the escalators metaphor took place during a workshop held within the context of the *Forum social québécois* (Québec's Social Forum) in Montréal. The goal this time was to explore several facets of this metaphor. In other words, to go beyond what it initially evoked to flesh out its theoretical potential.

Seventeen individuals from all over Québec, occupying various positions on the social ladder (persons living in poverty, artists, intervention workers, a researcher, a cleric, public sector employees, students, a union worker) attended the workshop, which quickly became self-directed, with those present directly helping facilitate the workshop.

After being introduced to the history of the metaphor, each person was invited to contribute a fact or idea to be considered in relation to the escalators image. These contributions were gradually recorded on posters, making it possible for the group to identify situations that might be linked to the escalators dynamic, intuitions and thoughts concerning the mechanics of the escalators, and courses of action or intervention strategies that could have an impact on the escalators. The group identified many familiar situations that could be modelled using this image, which they then began to detail and refine. This work supplied the material for a kind of manifesto-report including many intuitions concerning the escalators theory as well as various avenues for action. This report was later posted on the Forum's suggestion panel, according to the custom for this meeting.

7.2 A WORKSHOP FOR RAISING AWARENESS IN A SMALL GROUP

A few months after the JASP workshop, an intervention worker who had been a participant asked if the workshop could be repeated in the women's centre where she worked. The workshop was registered on the organization's calendar of coffee-meetings and presented twice. This time the process was less formal and, on both occasions, involved a small group of four to eight women, who functioned as one group throughout the activity. The aim was essentially to raise the group's awareness about the systemic dimensions of situations of poverty and inequality experienced by women. This workshop was focused on conveying how the metaphor can function as a critical tool for reading situations.

Although it was not homogeneous in terms of the living situations represented, the small group was directly affected by the problems related to the lower escalator. Many situations were evoked, including, in particular, the difficult position of low-income elderly women, either due to the lack of means available to them for avoiding being placed in residences, or

involving their ability to act as caregivers to prevent a family member from being placed in a residence. Thus, the women were struck by the extent to which financial means can make all the difference between a stable situation, supported by tax benefits, and a chain of events leading to a deterioration in a person's living conditions and that of members of their family.

This experience was not carried beyond a single workshop, but one can easily imagine a group taking hold of one of the situations identified during the workshop and deciding to act on it. The group could then find a way to cross-over its practical knowledge with other forms of expertise. It could then undertake, from its citizen perspective, to act on the escalators.

7.3 A WORKSHOP IN A STAIRWELL

The escalators metaphor had not yet appeared at the time of this workshop at a citizens' forum organized by the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté* (Collective for a Poverty-Free Québec) in May 2002. This forum was structured around a brief paragraph: "Lay the foundations for a Québec, and a world, without poverty and with greater solidarity and equality. Do so together with persons who live in poverty and exclusion. Thus, govern and develop ourselves otherwise." [Translation] The workshop aimed, as the paragraph implies, to explore the expression "with greater solidarity and equality." What was unique about it was that it took place in a stairwell at the site of the forum.

On the wall of this stairwell, a social ladder had been diagrammed, indicating the income levels corresponding to each fifth of the population, from the poorest to the wealthiest. These levels appeared on the wall's concrete blocks, and corresponded to their relative height (from the basement to the ceiling there were about 50 rows of blocks, which made it possible to assign a value of \$2000 per block and to create an income scale going from \$0 to \$100,000). Each person was given a sheet of paper with the chart showing the distribution of incomes by fifths, and with various other facts on the back. A series of questions also appeared on the back.

The participants were divided into five teams corresponding to the five quintiles of the population in terms of income. The teams positioned themselves on the staircase in the location corresponding to the average income level of the families in the quintile to which they had been assigned (from the poorest fifth to the richest fifth).

To begin with, the person facilitating the group (moving around as necessary on the staircase) made each person aware of the facts related to inequalities printed on the sheet they had been given.

Next, each team answered the following questions, from the perspective of the social position they had been assigned:

- How do you feel in the position you are in? And in relation to the other positions?
- Are you able, with your economic means, to meet your needs and those of your family?
- Would you say you are living in poverty?
- What are you lacking in life? What are your concerns? What are your aspirations? What makes you happy?

- If \$1000 were added to your annual income, what would you do with this additional income?
- What does showing greater solidarity mean, from your position?
- What does being more egalitarian mean, from your position?
- How must we organize ourselves to achieve solidarity and equality?

Next, the group assembled in one place on the stairwell to pursue its reflections.

- What does this experiment teach us?
- How can we become equal on a staircase? Is it possible? At what point do we become more equal? What double standards exist? The equality we talk about is between whom and whom? What is equality?
- Can we show solidarity on a staircase? How? What is solidarity?
- If the staircase had represented the world, instead of Québec, what would have been the difference?
- To lay the foundations for a Québec, and a world, without poverty and with greater solidarity and equality, what should a responsible government do? What should a responsible society do?



Figure 8 A workshop in a stairwell

Translation of text in Figure 9: The social ladder. We live in a stairwell with incomes that vary. The few figures included here indicate the parameters for Québec. Now imagine what this means on a global scale, when millions of people try to survive on less than a dollar a day. We all have essential needs that must be met. We all want a meaningful life for ourselves and our loved ones. How can we create more solidarity and less inequality? How can we dream consistently so that each person can achieve his or her dreams in a Québec and a world without poverty and where all of humanity can flourish? What thoughts has your time in the stairwell inspired?

Source: Citizens' forum of the *Collectif pour un Québec sans pauvreté*, Québec City, May 2002.

From here, the group moved on to a step common to each workshop at the forum, asking itself: “What are we aiming for?”, “What have we achieved?”, “What is blocking us?”, and “How can we remove these blocks?”

One could also imagine a workshop that would take place on or near some escalators.

8 AND TO CONCLUDE, A SMALL DOUBT... TO BE INTERPRETED AS A DEGREE OF FREEDOM!

A small detour by way of a fish story about using metaphors with moderation. We know the expression. It is better, we are told, to teach a person to fish than to supply that person with fish. In other words, professional training is better than financial aid for helping change people's circumstances. And then the expression is used to justify social policies referred to as "active" rather than "passive." And so on. If, however, we examine this expression more closely, we may begin to ask new questions: Who owns the lake? And the fishing equipment? Who is talking about what to whom? Are there still fish in the lake? Who are the fish sold to? At what price? Can one do something else besides fishing? There is no shortage of questions. And if we so desire, we can watch a disturbing documentary about fishing in one of Africa's great lakes, which will likely make us think twice before telling someone to fish for happiness in a lake (Sauper, 2004).

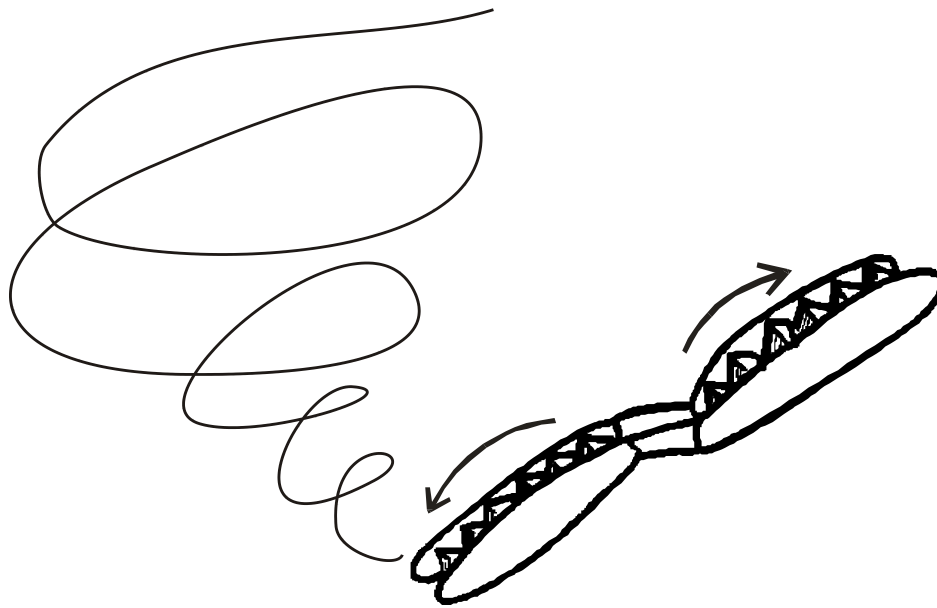
Now that the escalators image has taken hold and come to life, it could be useful, before concluding, to instil a small doubt, which can be considered a device for preventing dogmatism.

Metaphors, like theatre or fiction, are useful tools for "representing" the world. Vital and compelling, when seen from one angle, they twist, unravel and dissolve, when seen from another. Their meaning is not fixed and can vary according to the level of meaning from which they are approached.

A strong image that can focus collective attention, like that of the escalators, is a good candidate for facilitating collective efforts to conceptualize the issue of inequalities. It can initiate many reflective spirals, sparked both by free association and by deliberate efforts to make sense of what is observed. It can be used in all kinds of ways, whether to elicit points of view, analyze situations, model dynamics, develop strategies or arguments, or lead to decisions. It reaches its limits, however, when the degree of freedom it provided is lost and the model closes in on itself like an implicit truth.

So far, the escalators image has been of good use. It has led to impressive revelations. It has served well in contexts where the understanding of our world is improved by turning away from an approach focused on modifying the behaviour of persons experiencing inequalities ([helping people] climb up a step) to encompass the broader context surrounding their experience (to notice the escalators and get to work on them). But the image does not in itself provide explanations or solutions. It reminds us to act on systemic causes, "the causes of causes," and to focus attention on what is happening elsewhere in the system and, in particular, on the "upward escalator." It does not replace the determination to act at this level. It cannot justify strategies to "better help people climb the steps" based on a better understanding of the escalators, seen as immutable. Nor can the image be seen to limit the horizon, when the goal is to "work towards a world without poverty," one with greater equality and solidarity. This goal demands, instead, that the question of whether there must, in fact, be escalators, be asked... and what can replace them. Which, incidentally, can also become the subject of workshops!

On this note, we pass the baton to you, if, of course, you wish to accept it and to continue the journey.



“In the spiral”

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APPENDIX 1
POSTER TEMPLATE

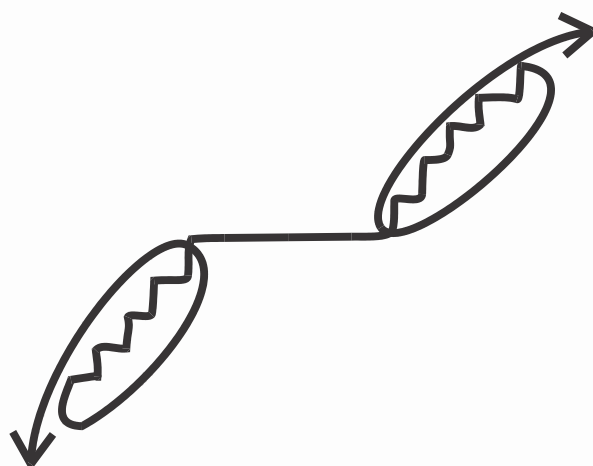
POSTER TEMPLATE

This poster can be downloaded in PDF format from the following web address:
www.ncchpp.ca/docs/escalators_poster_EN.pdf.

To continue to explore the escalators image

An example :

What is at stake? Describe and detail the circumstances (what, who, where, when, how, why).



How does the example work with the image? Draw on the diagram. What does it teach us ?

And if we ask some other questions?

How does this relate to health?

How are programs, policies, public budgets or taxation involved?

How could one take action here to have an effect on the escalators?

Notes made by _____, on __ / __ / 201

Labrie, V (2011) A Workshop on Inequalities using the Escalators Metaphor. Presentation kit. Montreal: NCCHPP.
Available online at : www.ncchppca/docs/escalators_EN.pdf

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