|  |
| --- |
| **Wands, spells and weasels: the tools of (health) policy development** |
| **Background/Objectives**  Words, words, words. Health promotion is about communication. Not just, or least, for health behaviour change, but also for policy development, shaping supportive environments for health, and setting conditions for making healthier (organisational) choices the easier choices. However, even though we often profile ourselves as master communicators, we don’t seem to ‘get’ the political nature of words. For instance, ‘health education’ became ‘health promotion’ which became ‘prevention’ which turned into ‘preven(tata)tive health’ – are they all the same thing, or are these examples of the maligned ‘lifestyle drift’?  In work in the space of settings for health in (South Western) Sydney we are facing similar word tricks. Settings are now ‘aerotropoleis’ and (health innovation) ‘super precincts’. These words seem to have the function of a magic (Harry Potter-like) wand, casting a spell on their recipients. Or are they just weasel words?  **Methods**  The presentation will review the theoretical and practical evidence of the (necessary) malleability of words and semiotics in the (health) policy process. It will demonstrate that there is no such thing as objective and factual ‘truth’ but that, for the purpose of policy development and implementation, words and images must play a fuzzy and multi-dimensional role. In their role of moving ‘evidence’ into practice and for policy advocacy, wands, spells and weasel words have a particular role to play.  **Results**  As health promotion advocates, researchers and practitioners we should remain vigilant when it comes to the hygienic and opportune usage of words and terminology in policy development and implementation processes. They are what Nancy Milio called ‘moving targets’ – and not necessarily moving in visible and linear trajectories. To enhance our effectiveness we must be aware of the magic that policy entrepreneurs (including ourselves!) try to weave.  **Discussion**  An appreciation of political science and the value of (manipulative) modes of communication in health promotion (policy) development is required.  **Keywords**  Policy, politics, communication, advocacy, semiotics, words, imagery |