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Mobilizing for Change: Capacity Building for Youth

What is this research about?

Assets Coming Together (ACT) for Youth is a community-university research project that involves allies from the Jane-Finch community and scholars. It seeks to develop a positive youth development (PYD) strategy to support urban communities like Jane-Finch. The project serves as an example of doing complex knowledge mobilization (KM) work with diverse partners. Scholars, community leaders, and youth acted as researchers and stakeholders for ACT for youth. How can KM go beyond sharing research findings, in order to build capacity and create social change in unique partnerships?

What did the researchers do?

The ACT for Youth project consisted of 5 working groups, with both a scholar and community member co-chair.

- **The Youth Survey Working Group**: What are the assets of youth in urban areas, and how can we can increase this development?

- **The Youth Voices Working Group**: What are the concerns of youth regarding their needs, well-being, and youth-on-youth violence?

- **Youth Economic Strategies Working Group**: What are the pathways for youth from high school into the labour market?

What you need to know:

KM strategies need to anticipate and respond to changes during the research process. Research and KM processes should also be designed to maximize opportunity and capacity among all participants.

- **Reframing Public Discourse Working Group**: How can we reframe public discourse to support a PYD strategy?

- **Program Evaluation and Monitoring Working Group**: How can we build a community-university research partnership towards a PYD strategy with equity and sustainability?

A KM and Communication (KM/C) Committee was also set up and co-chaired by a scholar and community member. All the co-chair members formed a research advisory group with a youth-led subcommittee.

The project also sought to apply certain concepts to their approach on KM/C activities. A Community Dialogue Approach was valuable to engage all partners in the research questions, methods and analyses developed. "Nimbleness" framed the project as open to changes in work, resources and circumstances. Collaboration brought "entanglement" into the research, because it was altered by the behaviours and thoughts of all partners.

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What did the researchers find?

While the KM/C group acted as traffic officer for the activities of the working groups, their initial plans saw some major changes. An e-bulletin was to be made from reporting templates that would be completed by each working group. However, the KM/C group found it difficult to maintain and limited in engaging each working group.

Thus, the researchers looked at KM activities that brought capacity building to both individuals and the working groups. They developed a new template that asked each working group to list their key findings, audiences, and the needs of their audiences as a result of the findings. They also considered new methods, time frames and resources in order to achieve these goals. The KM/C committee made it a priority to address 3 skill gaps for their distinct audiences: the use of social media, critical discourse analysis, and policy advocacy.

The project went beyond making research findings accessible by seeking meaningful change for all participants. While it is difficult to measure impact in a complex project like ACT for Youth, the researchers focused on the impact experienced by the participants themselves. The project participants expanded their ideas on:

• Pathways for success in school and work;

• What is possible;

• Positive youth development.

By expanding KM activities to include a youth-led conference, blogs, community forums, and a contest, more participants became "entangled" and knowledge was further shared. Members of the youth-led subcommittee also evaluated their work by saying that they felt more self-efficient and self-aware about possibilities in their future.

How can you use this research?

Scholars may find this research useful in expanding measured outcomes and impacts that come from doing community-university research. It also sheds important insight on doing a wide range of KM activities that engage all partners, especially when doing research with youth/community.

About the Researchers

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Knowledge Mobilization at York

York's Knowledge Mobilization Unit provides services for faculty, graduate students, community and government seeking to maximize the impact of academic research and expertise on public policy, social programming, and professional practice. This summary has been supported by the Office of the Vice-President Research and Innovation at York and project funding from SSHRC and CIHR.

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