Innovation in Collaboration

The Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring as a university-community partnership

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University-community partnerships are designed to address pressing social problems by combining the goals and resources of colleges and universities with those of community stakeholders. Ideally, partnerships develop as symbiotic projects that empower community organisations, enrich the community, and provide unique sources of data for research and evaluation. Partnerships take many forms and have a wide range of goals, from promoting health, to developing sustainable neighbourhoods, to improving public education. They may involve university students serving an under-resourced area of the community, or community members entering the university to participate in dialogue, planning and research. Universities and community partners may also work together to make research findings accessible to the wider community, increasing the chances that important advancements in scientific knowledge are applied in practice. Likewise, partnerships provide a forum for professional knowledge to shape the direction of academic research. With so many variations, locations and goals – and because securing funding for partnership projects is increasingly difficult (US Department of Housing and Urban Development 2010) – it is important for partnership researchers to identify commonalities present in the most effective university-community partnership models. Researchers have recently begun to define the characteristics of successful university-community partnerships.

Following a review of recent developments in the literature, this article explores the utility and flexibility of one of the more comprehensive partnership frameworks by applying it to a distinctive university-based summer institute designed to foster the exchange of knowledge between researchers and practitioners in the field of youth mentoring. One aim of the study reported here was to evaluate whether factors typically considered important for these partnerships would translate across contexts and provide a relevant conceptualisation for the summer institute model. Another goal was to learn how partnership criteria might be

further expanded and adapted. Based on the findings of the study, suggestions are also made for possible innovation in established university-community partnership models.

PARTNERSHIP TYPES AND TRENDS

In 1994, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) established the Office of University Partnerships (OUP) to promote the establishment and growth of university-community partnerships nationwide. In 1999, HUD published a report that described hundreds of partnerships divided into seven main categories: service-learning, service provision, faculty involvement, student volunteerism, community in the classroom, applied research, and major institutional change. HUD's Community Outreach Partnerships Centers (COPC) program was one of the largest efforts to promote cooperation among universities and local partners, with a focus on spurring economic development and providing safe, affordable housing in urban areas. However, the Bush Administration gradually scaled back federal support for partnerships, and by 2005 the COPC program was receiving no additional funding, effectively ending many large-scale, federally funded partnership projects. Some partnerships found innovative ways to continue without federal funds (Bloomgarden et al. 2006), and another outcome was the development of new university and community college offices dedicated to supporting university-community partnerships.

The current study explores a 'community in the classroom' partnership designed to bridge the often-disconnected worlds of research and practice. Service providers often find it difficult to keep up with the latest developments in research (Gira, Kessler & Poertner 2004). In a review of randomised controlled studies of dissemination efforts in health professions, Gira, Kessler and Poertner (2004) found that distributing research findings to practitioners (without additional implementation strategies) was ineffective in changing practice behaviours. The authors also found that traditional continuing education and professional development opportunities using only didactic techniques were also ineffective, while small group discussion and practice sessions generated moderate to large effect sizes compared to the control group. Addis (2002, p. 375) argued that hierarchical and unidirectional methods of dissemination created resistance to implementation and that 'Practitioners are more likely to adopt research products when they find them useful and can contribute creatively to their development and evaluation'. Sherrod (1999, p. 234) pointed specifically to the potential of university-community partnerships, which 'play many important roles, but an especially critical one is their attention to dissemination of research findings'. These findings suggest that more collaborative, partnership-oriented dissemination processes may hold promise for improved integration of scientific knowledge into professional practice.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS

An emerging body of literature has begun to define characteristics of successful collaborative efforts (Cardoza & Salinas 2004; Mai, Kramer & Luebbert 2005; Torres & Schaffer 2000; Schumaker, Reed & Woods 2000), as well as common challenges encountered by university-community partnerships (Lane, Turner & Flores 2004). Torres and Schaffer (2000) offer a comprehensive outline of eight essential partnership features, compiled from proceedings of the 1998 Wingspread Conference on university-community partnerships. Based on their experiences with COPC, Schumaker, Reed and Woods (2000) also offer eight ingredients for successful collaboration from the university's perspective. While there are slight differences between the lists, both research teams stress the importance of having a shared vision, clear communication and a clear organisational structure. Mai, Kramer and Luebbert (2005) put forward a similar, more distilled list based on a review of over a dozen partnerships. Cardoza and Salinas (2004) narrowed their list of key components for successful partnerships to five and their findings support the conclusions of the other authors. The current study employed the eight characteristics described by Torres and Schaffer (2000) as the analytic framework because it was the most comprehensive and had significant overlap with the findings of other studies. The four lists are compiled and compared in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of four lists of characteristics for successful university-community partnerships

Torres & Schaffer 2000	Schumaker, Reed & Woods 2000	Mai, Kramer & Luebbert 2005	Cardoza & Salinas 2004
	A history of collaboration		
Founded on a shared vision and clearly articulated values	Shared vision	Formulation of shared objectives	Vision
		Reflecting on the purpose of the partnership	
	Informality and flexibility		Flexibility
Beneficial to partnering institutions			
Composed of interpersonal relationships based on trust and respect	Good personal relationships, including high levels of trust		

Torres & Schaffer 2000	Schumaker, Reed & Woods 2000	Mai, Kramer & Luebbert 2005	Cardoza & Salinas 2004
Multi-dimensional: involve the participation of multiple sectors addressing a complex problem		Creating structures to support collaboration	Collaboration
Clearly organised and led with dynamism	Simple organisational structure		
Integrated into the mission and support systems of the partnering institutions	Linking and integrating with university resources		Support
Sustained by a 'partnership process' for communication, decision-making and initiation of change	Clear and frequent communication		Communication
	University's visibility		
Evaluated regularly with a focus on both methods and outcomes		Consulting data to assess outcomes	

Common challenges of establishing and maintaining successful partnerships have also been identified (Lane, Turner & Flores 2004). Partners with an initial shared vision may find they have differing perspectives on key issues. For example, Lane, Turner and Flores (2004) described a researcher–practitioner partnership in the corrections field that encountered obstacles due to disagreements over program implementation and evaluation. Cherry and Shefner (2004) identified issues of class, status and organisational differences as common impediments to successful university-community collaboration. In addition, some researchers have suggested that the short-term nature of most funding streams may render many partnership efforts unsustainable (Baum 2000).

THE SUMMER INSTITUTE ON YOUTH MENTORING
Youth mentoring is a prevalent and popular mode of intervention with children and youth across the nation (Walker 2007). Some formal youth mentoring programs, most notably those affiliated

with Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, have long histories and strong national networks. However, most programs are more loosely connected through organisations that provide advocacy, training and technical assistance, such as MENTOR/The National Mentoring Partnership, which currently has more than 5000 formal programs listed in its nationwide database of mentoring programs (K Zappie-Ferradino, personal communication, 11 February 2011). In most programs, service approaches have evolved gradually with the accumulated experience of practitioners. In the past 15 years, however, researchers have made a concerted effort to evaluate the effects of mentoring and to investigate the processes by which mentoring influences youth development (DuBois & Karcher 2005). The emergence of a theoretical and empirical literature addressing important issues in youth mentoring has facilitated a productive exchange between the academic and practice communities. In fact, a self-identifying community of practitioners with interests in research is beginning to coalesce, as reflected by 480 subscribers to the YouthMentoringListserv, a vehicle for disseminating youth mentoring research and practice knowledge (D DuBois, personal communication, 11 February 2011).

The Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring (SIYM) at Portland State University (PSU) was designed to offer a new and distinctive educational opportunity for experienced youth mentoring professionals. Participants attend an intensive week-long seminar discussing recent developments in theory and research on youth mentoring. Each session is led by a prominent, nationally recognised research fellow. The aim is a series of highly interactive discussions that provide an in-depth view of the research and examine its implications for practice. To encourage an active exchange among professional peers and with researchers, SIYM employs a small-group format (5–6 researchers, 25–30 professionals) with a selective admissions process. Ideal participants have several years of experience in the field and are seeking advanced professional development. Participants hold positions that enable them to influence the training and supervision of staff, the development of program models and the implementation of service delivery changes. Sessions include ample time for participants to think critically about their own program issues and explore opportunities for innovation. A fundamental premise of SIYM is that dialogue between experienced professionals and researchers stimulates relevant research and enhances translation to practice. This reciprocity between researcher and practitioner reflects what Saltmarsh, Hartley and Clayton (2009, pp. 9–10) call 'an epistemological shift that values not only expert knowledge that is rational, analytic and positivist but also values a different kind of rationality that is more relational, localized, and contextual and favours mutual deference between lay persons and academics. Knowledge generation is a process of co-creation, breaking down the distinctions between knowledge producers and knowledge consumers'.

EVIDENCE FOR EFFECTIVENESS OF THE 2007 SUMMER INSTITUTE

Created in 2007, the Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring aimed to produce mutual benefits for practitioners, researchers and the field of youth mentoring generally. An initial analysis of participant questionnaires indicated that the 2007 SIYM was largely successful in achieving its goals of providing a forum for professionals and researchers to exchange information, build relationships and plan together to improve mentoring research and programs (Jones & Keller 2009). Specifically, findings indicated that SIYM facilitates mutually beneficial relationships between researchers and practitioners; inspires new or renewed interest in research among practitioners; facilitates new collaborations among researchers; catalyses program innovation and improvement; facilitates planning and goal-setting among practitioners; and successfully promotes professional development.

Although the 2007 Summer Institute was considered successful, several areas for improvement were identified. SIYM organisers reviewed participant feedback and made adjustments before the 2008 event. More small group activities and discussions were incorporated into the presentation sessions. Structured social time was added in the form of a networking dinner. The success of the 2007 event and a successful grant proposal to conduct further analyses prompted the authors to begin considering SIYM as a promising and innovative university-community partnership model.

STUDY AIMS AND METHOD

The current study was designed to accomplish two main goals: 1) to evaluate the 2007 Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring in terms of established criteria that characterise successful university-community partnerships, and 2) to describe significant innovations introduced by SIYM that may add to current knowledge about how university-community partnerships can be most effective.

All 2007 SIYM participants were recruited to participate in the study. Consent forms were distributed with SIYM materials on the first day of the seminar, and all 24 forms were signed and returned. All five 2007 research fellows were also recruited for participation. Consent forms were distributed to research fellows via email and were returned by fax or mail.

On the last day of the seminar, questionnaires were distributed to all 24 participants. The questionnaires asked participants a series of open-ended questions about their experiences at SIYM and invited suggestions for improvement. Twelve participants (50 per cent) returned completed surveys on the last day of the seminar or by mail or email in the weeks following the event. The research fellows were asked to complete a separate questionnaire six to eight months following the 2007 Summer Institute. Four of the five researchers (80 per cent) returned

completed questionnaires by email or by mail. All completed questionnaires were converted to electronic documents and entered into ATLAS.ti for analysis.

Data were analysed in three stages. The first two stages used inductive, exploratory and grounded theory methods (Strauss & Corbin 1990) to label and synthesise questionnaire responses as they related to SIYM's overall mission. First, open coding was used to label, line by line, participant responses to the post-seminar questionnaire. The second stage consisted of axial coding, in which initial codes were grouped and organised into about a dozen main categories (e.g. participant professional development). After this stage, the initial evaluation of the Summer Institute was conducted, resulting in the findings summarised above (Jones & Keller 2009).

The third stage of data analysis was a typological analysis (Hatch 2002), in which the coded data were re-examined and recategorised according to characteristics of successful partnerships (Torres & Schaffer 2000). After coding and assignment of data to the typological categories based on the partnership framework, the researchers examined the contents of each category for sub-groupings, trends, or differences among the responses. A final step in the typological analysis was to examine all data not fitting one of the predetermined categories, and to decide whether they represented a useful addition to the partnership model. The typological analysis, including the identified innovations, yielded the results reported below.

The subjective nature of qualitative enquiry requires that researchers establish the trustworthiness of the research process and findings to increase confidence that rigorous methods were employed and that participants' voices were heard (Lietz, Langer & Furman 2006). The current study employed several strategies to ensure trustworthiness, including member checking, an electronic audit trail and a reliability check of the typological analysis by a researcher not involved with the study. The coding reliability check showed better than 76 per cent correspondence for assignment to categories, with discrepancies largely due to participant statements that reflected several categories simultaneously.

STUDY FINDINGS

Study participants reflected on a number of topics related to the conception of the Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring as a university-community partnership. The findings are first presented in terms of how well the data supported a correspondence between key characteristics of SIYM's success and Torres and Schaffer's (2000) criteria (see Table 1). Excerpts from questionnaire transcripts illustrating these connections are presented in the relevant sections below. Findings are then presented in terms of innovations to established partnership models apparent in SIYM.

Shared Vision

Data supported the centrality of a shared vision among participants for program improvement through interactive and intensive information sharing. Participants' responses strongly suggested that having time away from work and other 'day-to-day responsibilities' was critical to the success of the SIYM format. Participants also listed dozens of specific goals and plans for program improvement they intended to pursue upon returning to work. The interactive nature of the seminar also stood out for participants as a key characteristic. Several participants stated that the intimate setting and the full week of sessions allowed a 'deep dive' into important topics that was 'very rich and valuable'. Participants also anticipated that relationships developed at the SIYM would continue and that 'Having actually met and dialogued with researchers in the field has made the research "more real" to me … and therefore further energised my interest in staying up on the research. I have established a new network of professional friends to whom I can turn with my questions, need for support and/or information'. These elements together suggest that the original vision for SIYM stated by the founder in the first grant proposal was widely shared by participants:

> *SIYM is an approach for facilitating direct communication and collaboration to bridge the traditional divide between research and practice. The program leverages university resources to address an influential audience whose needs are not well met by current training programs.*

Mutual Benefit to Partnering Institutions

SIYM gave participants the opportunity to build relationships and develop their own professional skills and knowledge. As one participant said: 'As I was listening to the researchers' present their studies this past week, I was constantly evaluating what they were telling us and how that could inform best practices at my agency.'

Several participants also expressed the deeply personal nature of their experiences at SIYM, with one participant writing: 'This seminar has been profoundly meaningful to me on a number of levels. I have approached the content primarily as an executive director … but I have also responded to the content in my role as a Big Brother in a school-based mentoring program and as a father to a three-year-old daughter.'

The research fellows received valuable feedback from practitioners regarding the potential utility of their findings and what additional research would be useful. The researchers also initiated collaborations with practitioners and other researchers to pursue new research topics, develop assessment strategies and plan additional events that bring researchers and practitioners together. One researcher stated: 'I made tremendous strides on my mentor-related writing projects and received some valuable feedback on a planned grant proposal.'

Finally, Portland State University gained important exposure as a pioneer in facilitating collaboration between youth mentoring researchers and practitioners. Websites, articles, newsletters and book reviews mentioned the SIYM experience and the value it was adding to the field (e.g. Karcher 2008). The Dean of the PSU School of Social Work said that she believed the SIYM model would inform other efforts to bridge research and practice at the school.

Development of Interpersonal Relationships

Respondents stressed the importance of the relationships they had developed with other mentoring professionals from across the country and the world. Participants also appreciated the unique perspectives other participants presented, and one participant felt 'empowered to be part of such a prestigious group of people in the field of mentoring'.

Several participants also formed strong connections with researchers during the week and planned further communication and collaboration to address specific agency issues: 'I also feel that just getting to know these researchers and my colleagues from around the USA and Canada improves me professionally and increases the likelihood that I maintain contact with them over time.'

The researchers also developed relationships with each other and spent time discussing current projects as well as potential opportunities for collaboration. Researchers expressed a deepening of respect for practitioners and their professional knowledge and noted how they planned to collaborate with practitioners in the future.

Participants suggested that developing long-term relationships with one another could be facilitated through additional structure provided by the institute. One researcher suggested an institute newsletter to keep participants informed of new developments in research and to encourage ongoing dialogue between participants. Other recommendations included a web-based discussion board on the SIYM website, a special journal issue dedicated to projects initiated or developed at the Summer Institute, and inviting past participants back in subsequent years for further networking and professional development opportunities.

Multi-dimensional Participation

Mentoring programs may be operated by independent non-profit organisations; initiatives of schools, counties or other public entities; or partnerships between private and public institutions (DuBois & Karcher 2005). Some mentoring programs use volunteers while others employ professional mentors. Programs can be school based, community based, or web based, and they can be short term or long term. Many organisations across the country support mentoring programs through a variety of resources. Nearly all of these types of programs were represented at the Summer Institute, and participants expressed appreciation of the diversity of viewpoints included in the discussions. One participant wrote: 'I

liked having the variety of representatives present, including long-tenured practitioners and relatively new ones, big agencies and small, practitioners and supporters, etc.'

Clear Structure and Organisation

Participants were generally satisfied with the organisation and structure of SIYM. Participants appreciated the three-hour blocks of time allotted for presentations, which allowed 'time to really examine the researcher's methods and findings'. Participants felt that the small group size and seminar structure facilitated inclusiveness, openness and critical evaluation of the material. One participant said: 'The intimate size of the group and interactive discussion format of the Institute created a stimulating and dynamic learning environment that encourages sustained dialogue among the participants'. Several participants suggested having more breaks, but the vast majority of comments related to the organisation and structure of the seminar, suggesting that participants found the experience powerful and rewarding: 'Having the researchers present their findings in front of everyone, allowing time throughout for questions and debate, helped us all better absorb the research, setting us up to more likely understand and implement the key findings when we returned to our workplace.'

Integration into the Mission of Partnering Institutions

Many participants explicitly described professional benefits from their experiences at SIYM, which can be divided into two categories. The first category might be called inspirational because of its personal and motivational nature. Several participants reported a renewed commitment to the mentoring field, saying that the Summer Institute was inspiring, invigorating and rejuvenating. One participant said: 'The enthusiasm and commitment to mentoring was infectious and motivating'. The second category involved the acquisition of skills and knowledge: 'I have been in the mentoring business for 27 years and this was one experience that truly expanded my knowledge base … I learned more from the institute than from the last 15 conferences I have attended.' Other participants described very specific skills (e.g. how to set up a basic program evaluation) and knowledge (e.g. the importance of processes for ending mentoring relationships) that would directly inform and support their future work.

Several participants expressed concern that the momentum gained for program improvement at SIYM may be lost upon returning to their organisations. Potential obstacles included lack of resources for new initiatives, difficulty in integrating new ideas into established programs, resistance to change from employees and boards, and lack of time to fully communicate, plan and implement innovations. These barriers pose a threat to the potential for SIYM to become 'integrated into the mission of partnering organizations'.

Partnering Processes

The concept of a partnering process as described by Torres and Schaffer (2000) is dynamic and multi-dimensional, incorporating the presence of relationships (which has already been described as a key component of participants' experiences), communication and work for positive change. Some participants spoke about components of the partnering process, but identified them as separate characteristics rather than as directly related parts. For example, one participant said that two-way communication between researchers and practitioners made SIYM a powerful professional development experience – but did not describe the formation of relationships or any specific positive change anticipated. Another spoke mostly of the potential for positive change: 'Both practitioners and researchers can offer new ideas and creative program ideas to each other – that was often the exciting part of our time together.' However, several participants conveyed the idea of a partnership by describing processes that combined these characteristics. One participant stated that, through SIYM, practitioners were able to help researchers translate what they had learned into effective practices. This simple statement demonstrates the intricate link between the relationships (developed during the Summer Institute), communication (practitioners helping researchers) and positive change (applying effective practices in the field). Another participant described the partnering process and the interplay of these three elements more explicitly: 'Having access to the researchers – hearing their findings, being able to discuss them fully, and being able to explore ways to improve our practices – was of extreme value.'

Regular Evaluation

Since its inception, SIYM has incorporated systems for participant feedback and ongoing evaluation of program effectiveness. The results of an initial evaluation of the 2007 Summer Institute and subsequent changes to the SIYM format were described earlier. Many other improvements to SIYM have been made in subsequent years.

There have also been several outgrowths from the initial SIYM. For example, in response to demand from local organisations, a half-day community symposium provides a summary of major themes and findings presented at SIYM to local practitioners. The success of SIYM also provided a foundation for the creation of the Center for Interdisciplinary Mentoring Research at Portland State University. The Center supports numerous events and initiatives promoting mentoring research and fostering connections with programs. In a comprehensive study of 19 university-community research partnerships sponsored by the Pew Partnership, Ferraiolo and Freedman (2002, p. 29) found that specialised campus-based research centres proved 'an effective and visible tool to connect university and community needs'.

SIGNIFICANT INNOVATIONS TO ESTABLISHED UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP MODELS

Participant responses suggested that the Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring demonstrated several core characteristics that may be considered innovative in that they represent a departure from common university-community partnership models.

Expanding the Idea of 'Community' in a Partnership

Participants of the 2007 Summer Institute travelled to Portland from 14 states and two provinces in Canada. A review of records from the 2008, 2009 and 2010 Summer Institutes showed that participants, including research fellows, have now travelled from 30 states, four Canadian provinces and five foreign countries to participate. Most partnership efforts engage universities with communities that are in close physical proximity to the campuses. Some universities encourage students and faculty to make national and international connections (Hart & Wolff 2006), but these partnerships are often still defined geographically. For example, one Tufts University effort serves under-resourced schools in Boston (Toomey 2007), while another Tufts partnership provides health resources in Tanzania (Kamuhabwa & Lee 2009). Yet few universities have engaged larger, more conceptually defined groups, such as 'the mentoring community', as potential partners for university-community partnership projects. Even partnerships that seek to disseminate research findings to practitioners and other stakeholders rarely engage the intended audience directly, more often setting up online clearinghouses or distributing printed research summaries. While such partnerships attempt to bridge the gap between research and practice, evidence suggests that these dissemination methods are inadequate for creating changes in practice (Gira, Kessler & Poertner 2004). SIYM, on the other hand, manages to reach an influential cohort of professionals from across the nation and world using strategies for dissemination, including interactive learning and the use of highly credible leaders in the field, who have shown promise in influencing the use of research findings in practice (Gira, Kessler, & Poertner 2004).

Summer Institute participants described the benefit of sharing information with other participants from a wide range of locales. In some cases, representatives from rural programs that operate in geographic isolation experienced many partnership characteristics (e.g. personal relationships, shared vision, the partnering process) as encouraging and validating. Several participants also felt a new or renewed sense of community with other mentoring professionals, and expressed the belief that interpersonal relationships would help hold the community together. Engaging with others from diverse locations also inspired some participants to envision positive change that could be enacted through policy initiatives at the state and national levels.

Using Short, Intensive Format to Achieve Long-term Goals
Most university-community partnerships are intended to be
ongoing collaborations in which partners meet regularly to plan
and work together towards a common goal. Most partnership
efforts require continuity and long-term commitment from
all partners, but the SIYM has a different goal and a different
approach. The SIYM itself lasts a week, while the relationships,
communication, collaboration and change initiatives are intended
to continue long after the SIYM has ended. In effect, the university
plays 'matchmaker', bringing together dozens of participants and
a handful of researchers to introduce them, help them to get to
know each other, and encourage them to carry on meaningful
and mutual relationships. The university's involvement with
each individual participant may indeed be short and temporary
(although a number of participants have returned for community
events and symposia in subsequent years), but the engagement
and commitment to the mentoring community, at least for some,
appears set to last. In fact, a number of participants have described
specific plans for engaging with research fellows, other researchers
and each other in the coming months and years.

One drawback of the short-term nature of the SIYM was
described by participants. Several practitioners felt that a more
formal ongoing relationship with SIYM participants was necessary
to keep the momentum going upon their return home. The 2007
SIYM included no formal process or forum for participants to
keep in touch, except through an email list. One participant
wrote: 'I feel like I have a cohort of support that I can draw on if
needed', but added, 'I would like for that to be more ongoing and
intentional … maybe even just using the website or a group listserv
that is focused on mentoring research issues'.

Introducing an Inexpensive and Self-sustaining Approach
Gilderbloom and Mullins (2005) describe two types of university-
community partnerships: 1) federally funded, top–down
programs with a city-wide or regional focus, and 2) collaborative,
locally funded, bottom–up approaches that focus on a single
neighbourhood. While most partnerships have taken one of these
forms, the SIYM introduced a relatively low-cost and sustainable
approach that reached far beyond the typical geographic
boundaries. Each stakeholder made financial or other resource
investments in the program. Participants, or the organisations
they work for, paid $725 in tuition, plus travel expenses and other
incidental costs. Although these expenses represent a significant
investment on the part of participants and their organisations,
the demand for learning opportunities such as SIYM will likely
increase as foundations and government funders place ever greater
expectations on programs to demonstrate outcomes. Furthermore,
access to relevant research will grow in importance as funding
becomes contingent on the use of evidence-based practices.
Practitioner commitment to research–practice dialogue is likely to
continue, as suggested by one SIYM participant's promise: 'And

next time around, you can count on our organization for even more logistical and financial support in making it happen'. Since 2007, even as economic conditions disintegrated, interest and participation in the SIYM has increased steadily. Through 2010, 16 research fellows and four special guest speakers, as well as over 120 mentoring program leaders, have participated in the SIYM, with hundreds of others participating in the community events and symposia sponsored by the institute.

Beyond tuition revenue, two other sources of support contribute to the long-term viability of the SIYM. First, the PSU School of Social Work has an endowed professorship focused on youth mentoring research. This position provides dedicated time to direct the SIYM. The school also offers meeting spaces and other forms of tangible support. Second, the SIYM is supported by philanthropies that see value in a well-educated workforce for mentoring programs. The SIYM has been successful in securing funds from community foundations and individual donors. These resources are used to offer scholarships in the form of tuition reduction and to cover some general operating expenses.

DISCUSSION

The current study adds several important elements to our understanding of how successful university-community partnerships operate, and how they can adopt or develop sustainable practices over the long-term. First, the findings lend support for the list of successful partnership characteristics proposed at the Wingspread conference and reported by Torres and Schaffer (2000). The relative lack of empirical studies comparing partnership efforts makes it difficult to confirm whether factors identified by one study are pertinent beyond the (usual) single case examined. This study helps move the university-community partnership field one step closer to establishing a reliable framework that practitioners and researchers can use as a foundation for evaluating and strengthening existing partnerships or establishing new ones. While the current study complements and extends our knowledge about university-community partnerships, the cross-sectional design provides only a snapshot of participants' attitudes following the event, and does not offer any indication of the longer-term impacts that the SIYM may have had on practitioners, researchers and mentoring programs themselves. We recommend that future research be directed towards longitudinal evaluation of partnerships at both individual and agency levels. Partnership researchers can also use emerging knowledge about the characteristics of successful partnerships to explore how these characteristics are related to one another. In other words, studies like this may help set the stage for conceptualising and testing dynamic models of partnership *processes*, moving beyond simple lists to understanding how the interplay of structures and relationships contribute to the development and perpetuation of effective partnership initiatives.

The Summer Institute also demonstrated that dissemination of research findings and discussion on the implications of research can be successfully facilitated in person and especially through building interpersonal relationships. Not only are the typical clearinghouse and conference approaches ineffective strategies for putting research findings to use (Gira, Kessler, & Poertner 2004), they largely neglect the important contribution that practitioners can make to the research-to-practice (and practice-to-research) conversation. In contrast, SIYM facilitated meaningful dialogue and relationships designed to keep the communication going beyond the seminar week. Considering that the research literature and practice knowledge are continually expanding, SIYM has introduced a format that could help move away from passive modes of dissemination to utilise active processes of implementation and integration of important research findings.

The SIYM model also demonstrated the potential for university-community partnerships to raise the standards for professional development. Several participants said that the SIYM was the best professional development experience of their careers. SIYM combined the research of academic conferences with the intensive and interactive nature of professional training to offer a model that participants found rewarding, inspiring and, in some cases, transformative. A review of effective professional development practices in schools found that successful programs shifted their focus 'from isolated learning and the occasional workshop to … collaborative reflection and joint action' (WestEd 2000, p. 11). One participant described the importance of collaborative reflection while discussing the Summer Institute, saying: 'I believe [practitioners and researchers] need each other – sort of like holding up a mirror to let each other know what things look like from a different perspective'. The findings of the current study also showed that the SIYM successfully addressed what Smith and Gillespie (2007) found were several major obstacles to professional development in education, including *time constraints*, *lack of face-to-face interaction*, and *mismatch of goals*, suggesting that the innovative SIYM model could be applied more broadly to bring practitioners and researchers together to make better use of research and practice knowledge.

Finally, SIYM offers a low-cost, sustainable model of university-community collaboration that can have large-scale and potentially long-term impacts. Many partnership models require substantial financial resources. Bloomgarden and colleagues (2006) describe the challenge of securing matching funds from university and community partners in order to qualify for federal grants. Holland (2003, p. 4) contends that pursuit of external funding from various sources can lead to 'the trap of episodic attention to individual grants and projects, which tends to create superficial and temporary relationships'. The Summer Institute has from the beginning taken an entrepreneurial approach and relied on a balanced combination of funding from 1) tuition payments

from participants, 2) university support in the form of faculty time dedicated to directorship of SIYM, and 3) small foundation grants for community events and other expenses. The relatively low cost of the event combined with significant contributions from stakeholders may be a formula that attracts increasing attention as the economy continues to struggle. While this sustainable model may impose certain logistical limitations on SIYM, the event has enjoyed consistent growth and expanded reach since its inaugural year.

There are several limitations to the current study that should be considered. First, the combined return rate for questionnaires was 55 per cent, meaning that data analysis was based on responses from just over half of SIYM attendees. There is no way to tell how the participation of non-responders would have changed the results. It is possible that participants who had a positive experience were more likely to fill out and return questionnaires. Second, while various measures were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study's results, the authors' professional involvement with the Summer Institute may have introduced an element of bias into the data analysis and the interpretation of findings. Finally, the partnership models described in this study are largely untested and their long-term impacts are unknown, so further research is needed before conclusions can be drawn about the value of one partnership model versus another. Despite these limitations, the findings of the current study tell a compelling story of an innovative university-community partnership that may offer other organisations and institutions a framework for establishing their own successful collaborative efforts.

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