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Beyond "Giving Science Away": How University-Community Partnerships Inform Youth Programs, Research, and Policy

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There is a clear need to bridge the gaps between research, practice, and policy for youth (Takanishi, 1993). In this report we propose that university-community partnerships afford the exchange of existing knowledge and the generation of new knowledge that serves this goal. We use examples from our recent research with two youth programs to illustrate steps to creating and maintaining university-community partnerships with an intergenerational and ethnically diverse team that includes youth, families, and staff as well as undergraduates, graduate students, post-doctoral researchers, and faculty. We show how such research can generate knowledge that is relevant for programs and their participants as well as for theoretical debates and social and educational policy.

Connecting Research, Policy, and Community Practice

In recent years, researchers in developmental psychology have renewed their interest in connecting basic research and theory development to applied and policy-relevant research. This marks a return to the goals and values of the Child Study movement of the 19th century, when development was studied in its natural contexts (White, 1996) and interventions were aimed at enhancing those contexts. It also harks back to the Civil Rights era of the 1960s when many developmental scholars were active in federal, state, and local work on behalf of children, youth, and families. Some current work focuses on youth programs and how best to invest in youth by building on the existing strategies of youth, families, and those who work with them (National Research Council, 1993; Takanishi, 1996), while other work focuses more on schooling and youth. And a new generation of research examines how youth move across their worlds of family, school, peers, and community and how intergenerational linkages can bridge between individual relationships and institutions (Cooper & Denner, 1998).

In her address to the 1997 SRCD biennial meeting, Hillary Rodham Clinton urged the research community to "make the connection between research, public policy, and people's ordinary lives" ("Mrs. Clinton: Connect Research," 1997, p. 1). While many psychologists conduct research designed to affect specific social policies (Carnegie Council, 1992; Lorion, Iscoe, DeLeon, & Van den Bos, 1996; Takanishi, 1993; Zeldin & Price, 1995) or to strengthen specific programs (Barber & Crockett, 1993; Lerner & Galambos, 1998; National Research Council, 1993), other researchers struggle with how to conduct research that contributes more effectively to the general well-being of children, youth, and families. For research and policy to be relevant to diverse groups of people, those groups must be represented at the table (Allen & Grobman, 1996).

The goal of applied social science research is to "solve a problem or to provide information that can be put to some specific use" (Zigler, 1998, pp. 532-533). Such research strives to be both ecologically valid, i.e., reflecting the conditions, including the values of local communities, and externally valid, i.e., being relevant to communities beyond those involved in the original studies (Bandura, 1997; Fisher & Murray, 1996; Smith, 1990). Yet achieving both forms of validity can be difficult (McAdoo, 1990; McLoyd & Steinberg, 1998). For example, findings involving programs in one cultural community cannot be generalized directly to other culturally distinct populations (Laosa, 1990). Determining what about a program made a difference may be blocked by difficulties in achieving random sampling and assignment to conditions. These tensions between community-specific and universal goals, which are not easily resolved, confront researchers who seek to make their work meaningful for theory, policy, and practice (Cooper & Denner, 1998).

Three Models of University and Community Research.

Researchers as Expert Consultants

In the first model, university representatives serve as consultants who conduct research. They act as experts who "give away" knowledge based on research on national or state samples. A disadvantage of this model is that community members may distrust or disbelieve data that were not collected in their community (Small, 1996). In other words, the information provided may not be ecologically valid for the local community. Although such consultations may be useful, this model does not incorporate perspectives of community members, nor does it increase their capacity to work on their own questions.

Community Agendas

In the second model, community members identify a specific problem and university researchers and community members work together to solve it. In this case, research is driven by local questions rather than by theoretical or empirical scholarship. This model tends to emphasize the ready expertise of community members over that of researchers (Peterson, 1995), so that data may be ecologically but not externally valid, decreasing their relevance for universal theory development. Because this model is problem-driven, the likelihood that the research will be sustained may be limited.

University-Community Partnerships

In the third model, research questions are asked in the context of specific communities and programs but also examine universal processes to address theoretical debates and policy issues that reach beyond individual communities (Cooper & Denner, 1998). By building on the goals of community members and engaging them as partners, researchers who bring theoretical and methodological tools-help communities identify and use their own resources (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Weiss & Greene, 1992). In this "collaboration among stakeholders" model (Cooper, Jackson, Azmitia, Lopez, & Dunbar, 1995; Tharp & Yamauchi, 1994), collaborative relationships are developed from the beginning among program staff, families, school personnel, policymakers, and youth themselves. In this way, stakeholders work together to define the goals of the research and how programs are developed, monitored over time, and evaluated. These partnerships increase the likelihood that research will include the perspectives of underrepresented groups. Thus the goals of the partnership model are to work together to construct research priorities, improve method and refine theory, develop a sustainable research infrastructure in the community, and provide information that helps improve programs and policies over time.

The university-community partnership model grows out of traditions of action research, in which research is driven both by questions of community members and theoretical debates of different academic disciplines (Rapaport, 1985; Small, 1995). Current university-community partnerships respond to various pressures-to national policy interest in community building, to a growing emphasis on program and school accountability to funders at local, state, and national levels, to interest in community-level data, to the need for research on and by underrepresented groups, and to concerns over racial, ethnic, and social class divisions in our communities. Finally, concern about inequitable access of diverse groups to educational opportunities, from kindergarten to college, has begun to bring together schools and religious, business, medical, and juvenile justice communities to act on behalf of youth and families.

In the service of these goals, this paper focuses on three themes:

(1) steps to building sustainable university community partnerships;

(2) relevance of such collaborations for programs, participants, researchers, and policymakers; and

(3) challenges and resources for sustainable university-community partnerships.

To illustrate this approach, we draw from two sources: our collaborative research with youth program professionals and front-line staff-, and analyses of previous university-community partnerships which have addressed social problems and the training of socially responsible researchers (Fisher, Murray, & Sigel, 1996; Fitzgerald, Abrams, Church, Votruba, & Imig, 1996; McHale & Lerner, 1996; Oden, 1995; Ostrom, Lerner, & Freel, 1995; Small, 1996; Zeldin, 1995).

Steps to Building University Partnerships with Community Programs

The steps described here build on our experiences as a university-based research team in partnership with two community youth programs. Our university research group has collaborated for three years with two community-based nonprofit organizations whose executives and staff members wanted to learn more about how their programs made a difference for youth.

Our work on university-community partnerships draws on anthropology, psychology, sociology, and social policy to link individuals, relationships, institutions, and cultural communities over time. Our first perspective is an intergenerational model that values the perspectives of children, youth, and young adults, as well as adults and elders; we build cultural bridges that create opportunities for youth to "move up" as leaders and for younger and older adults to "give back" to children, youth, and communities (Cooper, 1997; Cooper & Denner, 1996). Our second perspective is a youth development approach that emphasizes the strengths rather than only the problems of youth and aims to build on youth's initiative (Denner, Lopez, Cooper, & Dunbar, 1998; Zeldin, 1995). Third, our work draws on the Bridging Multiple Worlds model, which addresses how ethnically diverse youth navigate their worlds of families, schools, peers, and communities as they move through school (Cooper, in press; Cooper et al., 1995; Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 199 1).

In our community partnership, the university research group has included a faculty member, a postdoctoral fellow, two graduate students, and four undergraduate students (two of whom were also program staff). We formed partnerships with two programs that work with low-income and minority youth and their families; most participants and staff are of Mexican descent.

The first program is privately funded and is modeled on Lang's "I Have a Dream" program. It provides academic outreach to a selected group of sixth to twelfth graders by offering after-school tutoring, weekend and summer classes, and academic advising for parents and students. Upon completion of high school and enrollment in the local community college, the students receive a $1,000 scholarship.

The second program is part of a nonprofit national organization that provides alternatives to youth violence through community outreach, leadership development, and economic development. Their youth programs include academic help, personal support, cultural experiences, and job opportunities. Our work with this latter organization was concentrated in three community-based after-school programs, which provide a safe place for children and adolescents to learn, socialize, and have fun.

Our partners requested that we use our partnership experience to prepare guidelines for the next generation of researchers who work with their programs. This report formulates these guidelines. The recommended steps to building sound partnerships are as follows:

Step 1. Make goals explicit.

University and community partners must clarify what they want to accomplish and be prepared for goals to change as staff and other resources and priorities shift.

The reasons for engaging in a partnership must be made clear. It has been suggested that "for universities, the mission is to provide training experiences that will equip the next generation of professionals to address the developmental needs of society. For community organizations, the mission is to provide the services that are needed for today, not tomorrow, or in the next generation" (Fisher & Murray, 1996, p. 9). For example, program staff may be looking for volunteers and concentrating on how to attract youth and hold their attention, while program executives may need data on participation, impact, and cost effectiveness. On the university's part, student participants may be looking for experience with programs and research, whereas faculty may want publishable data that speak to their research questions and will satisfy funders. We found,

however, that universities and community programs also have overlapping goals, which include building their community It is the task of the partnership to define these goals and develop ways to build common ground and negotiate differences (Mayo, 1997).

Our university team came to the partnership with questions raised by our previous theoretical and empirical work as well as our conversations and work with community program staff, youth, and families. In earlier work, we had developed the Bridging Multiple Worlds model (Cooper & Denner, 1998; Phelan et al., 1991) and had studied adolescents' strategies for negotiating challenges (Denner, Aber, & Allen, 1998). We were funded to address four core questions about how the multiple worlds of children's lives affect their developmental pathways (Thorne & Cooper, 1995): What are the contexts or worlds of children's daily lives? How do parents, teachers, and other key adults understand these worlds? How do children navigate their worlds to construct their own and others' development? How do social class, gender, race, ethnicity, and immigration status affect children's pathways? As our collaboration progressed, these questions were sharpened to speak more directly to the strengths and questions of the program staff.

Step 2. Choose a program and develop relationships.
Listen to Program staff.

Partnerships are likely to develop more easily when they build on existing relationships with community members. Informal discussions can help identify shared interests, and conducting interviews with individuals in different roles helps to clarify the program's history, goals, and practices. Through such interviews, program staff come to know the research team and can convey their personal theories about what children and youth need to develop optimally (Denner, Orellana, & Cooper, 1997). These theories provide important information about how programs are run. For example, one staff member stressed the importance of "giving youth a context" and asked our help in organizing and participating in field trips. Beliefs about what youth need are grounded in the daily realities of the community and provide an important context for the research.

In communities with racial and social class divisions, universities are often seen as removed from the community. The greater these divisions, the more time is required for building relationships. Research groups working in ethnically diverse communities should include bilingual and bicultural researchers and people familiar with the local cultural context (Castaneda, Ulanoff, & Rios, 1996). In OUT partnership, two undergraduates worked as both program and university staff. Regardless of background, developing relationships among researchers and community members requires patience and time (Small, 1996).

Step 3. Choose your primary contacts.
Some partners are more closely connected to a program than others.

Partnerships can be formed "from the bottom up" by working with front-line staff or "from the top down" by working with management or executives. In some programs, executives and managers have the most interest or greatest concerns about research questions; in other programs, front-line staff welcome volunteers and have questions about how to strengthen their program; and, of course, both may be present in the same program.

Front-line staff are largely ignored in the literature because collaborations often involve the more senior staff. But younger staff provide a key bridge to the youth, families, and resources outside the program because they often come from the communities in which they work (Cooper, Denner, & Lopez, in press). And entering an organization from either the top or bottom can inhibit the necessary investment and cooperation from other levels. In our

partnership we have found that long-term volunteering builds trust with all members of an organization.

Step 4. Develop a common language.
Informal interactions help establish common ground.

Volunteering to tutor or chaperone program events and attending local cultural events show commitment to a program. In our case, these activities helped the university researchers stay informed about the programs and about political issues in the Latino community. Because program staff and the youths' siblings, parents, and extended family members attended these events, we could have conversations in informal settings with them. This promoted a common language and understanding that were useful when it came time to develop shared project goals.

Step 5. Learn about the program's history with research.
Some communities have had negative experiences with researchers in the past.

Most university partners recognize that they are not the first researchers program staff have encountered. Many programs have experienced what our partners call "drive-by research," when researchers or evaluators have left the scene without making findings available or useful to program staff. Many individuals in organizations do not understand how research could help them and many are concerned that research findings could hurt them. It has also been argued that partnerships can be disempowering when one partner feels misrepresented (Mayo, 1997). Thus, it is important to discuss early on how research can benefit the program, as well as who makes decisions about the use of the data and how findings will be represented (Archer, Pettigrew, & Aronson, 1992). The partnership should not begin data collection until these issues are addressed.

Step. 6. Define roles in the partnership.
Identifying the decision-makers is crucial.

Successful partnerships decide at the outset who the partners are to be (Zeldin, 1995). Not all members of a community can be included in every decision. Youth and staff advisory groups contribute to the success of a partnership, and it is important that the decision-makers and advisors listen to the views of those they represent. Often there is one community individual whose motivation and creativity are key to the success of a program and prospective partnership (Heath & McLaughlin, 1991; McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994; Weiss, 1998). It is important to make sure this person is part of the partnership. Similarly, on the university side, only certain students and faculty are involved (Zeldin, 1995). While it is not necessary to limit who joins the partnership, it is important to secure the commitment of key liaisons for the long term.

Step 7. Do research with theoretical and social relevance.
Research questions must be relevant both to the program and to theoretical and policy debates.

Through ongoing discussions, we were able to identify the research questions of different members of the youth program offering alternatives to youth violence. They were interested in how to attract youth, what activities were working, what youth thought of the program, and what they were getting out of it. As questions were developed, university participants summarized research on other programs that have succeeded in attracting and sustaining the involvement of youth (e.g., Heath & McLaughlin, 1991; Quinn, 1997). In addition, we linked questions of program staff to our guiding questions derived from research on the contexts of children's daily lives, how they seek out resources, and who helps them achieve their goals. As

a result, we had a set of theoretically and socially relevant research questions: Who are the youth who come? Why do they participate? How does the program make a difference?

Step 8. Have an early success.
Begin with a simple task that is useful and can be readily accomplished.

Community program staff may expect answers more quickly than researchers typically generate them, and an early success helps build the partnership (Fitzgerald & Abrams, 1997). In the case of our programs, we and the staff wanted to know why youth attended the program, so a first step was to identify the patterns of program participation. By observing and inquiring, we learned that both programs were already collecting data on attendance. We used these data to make graphs to show variation in attendance over time. These were easy to understand and elicited questions from program staff about why youth attended and how they viewed the program. They recognized the value of these graphs and asked us to teach them how to make to them.

Step 9. Collect data together.
Find ways for team members to be involved in data collection.

It is important to involve both partners in aspects of each step of data collection from instrument design, to data entry and analysis, to interpretation. Multiple methods, including-field notes, focus groups, and surveys, as well as school grades, are useful to describe changes over time and to keep all people informed of what is being learned.

In our partnership, staff from each program helped make the research instruments relevant to their youth and assured that questions were appropriate. They also participated in translating the instruments into Spanish. Staff also played key roles. in communicating with families and youth. They explained consent forms to parents and obtained data from children who were not present on data collection days. Staff also helped integrate data collection into daily activities as well as social events, such as family picnics, which were opportune times to obtain consent or hold parent meetings.

How a program is run can dictate what kind of data can be gathered. Some programs 'may have procedures already in place for collecting information. One program in our project, for example, already had years of data they could use to address their question about why youth participated. Analyses of these data revealed that youth were coming to see friends and to learn. To help address the research question, "How does the program make a difference?" attendance data were collected, but the program infrastructure made it difficult to collect these data systematically Instead, program influence was addressed using data on youth perspectives, which indicate that academics, respect and rules, and recreation were the three main things learned. In addition, to illustrate potential developmental benefits, we summarized how program practices can be linked to what research literature suggests are the key developmental opportunities programs can provide.

Step 10. Make findings accessible.
All parties must have access to summaries Of research findings, while individual-level data are kept confidential.

Most program staff, participants, and their families are not used to reading long reports or statistical analyses. And unfortunately, researchers do not always translate findings into useful information for programs and policy (Lorion et al., 1996; Zervigon-Hakes, 1995). Thus it is important in the partnership model that findings be made comprehensible for the lay person. Bilingual newsletters are useful for sharing research findings mixed with information about

resources of use to children and families who can read; for others, oral presentations are more effective.

In our project many of our findings were presented in small data packets with graphs and talking points that summarized key findings on specific themes, such as why youth come to the program, youth understanding of contexts, and youth problem-solving strategies. We made presentations to funders and program staff on these topics and clarified questions. We also wrote articles and made presentations to academic audiences on the intergenerational model and on the strategies youth use to access resources. Because the research questions were generated together, both parties had little difficulty understanding their relevance and importance.

Step 11. Produce products for multiple stakeholders.
Tangible products include data, findings, and the infrastructure to support ongoing research.

Presenting findings in different formats serves to publicize results and strengthen university-community partnerships and community capacity. Our partnership generated information on youth goals, participation, and strategies for accessing resources; the importance of young adult brokers; and how youth experience the program. This information was presented in data packets, articles, and talks. The findings may bring programs together; students from one of our programs, for example, cited "becoming staff of the other program as a career goal.

For maximum effectiveness, partnerships should build an infrastructure in the program that can support ongoing research. Our partnership developed forms and instruments for record-keeping, surveys, and databases that are still being used. The partnership also led to enhanced staff skills. In the course of tracking youth participation, for example, program staff requested and received training in maintaining computer records and making graphs. These are skills they can use in future projects.

How Partnerships Make Research Relevant for Multiple Stakeholders

Partnerships between university and community program personnel can generate useful knowledge for multiple stakeholders: program participants, program developers and staff, researchers, policymakers, families, schools, and youth. In general, our partnership built community networks and generated information about how and why youth engage in programs and what they learn from them, as well as how they navigate their worlds of families, peers, schools, and communities as they move through school. It is instructive to consider how our partnership process and findings spoke to and affected our different stakeholders.

Benefits to Youth in Programs

Program participants benefited by having opportunities to share their perspectives on the program and by seeing resulting changes. Through personal interactions and the surveys, youths' voices were made clearer to those in charge of the programs. For example, their viewpoint provided the impetus for writing and receiving a grant to fund leadership activities for girls (Denner & Dunbar, 1997), as well as a restructuring of aspects of the programs. Staff of one program were surprised to find that 43% of their participants reported they learned about academics and 50% reported that program staff were the people most responsible for helping them with homework. As a result, the program's daily activities were restructured to allow an hour of quiet homework time. The partnership also gave youth participants greater access to adults with links to the university Many of them had never been to a university Through conversations and field trips with research staff, they learned about college life and opportunities and met college students with backgrounds similar to their own.

Benefits to Programs

Both programs in our partnership benefited from the extensive data obtained, including data on participation and impact required by their funders. The partnership also afforded access to and replicated other research on successful programs. Youth in one program reported that they participated to secure relationships with staff and peers, to learn, to have fun, and to have a safe place to be away from home and the neighborhood. In the other program, youth reported relying on school or themselves to achieve goals; but they did not always recognize how relationships and the community could help them achieve these goals. These findings are consistent with studies of other programs (Gambone & Arbreton, 1997; Higgins, 1988). Instruments that we used to collect data are still being used; these include a career timeline and questions about resources for achieving goals.

Our research staff helped programs to articulate the importance of these findings by situating them within the context of social and funding priorities, as well as within broader questions about risk and protective factors for children and adolescents. For example, youth responses that staff played an important role in why they participate fits with research and policy priorities about providing close, positive connections for youth.

A sustainable research infrastructure emerged as we collaborated on activity materials and data collection, increasing the capacity of program staff to track attendance and academic progress. Staff learned new skills, including how to ask research questions and how to enter and graph data on the computer. Following a training we offered on computer spreadsheets and data entry, one staff member transferred these new skills to his fundraising efforts. Others learned skills to better describe the value of what they do, such as showing their program to be a safe haven for children and youth. Because the research instruments we developed together tapped issues of interest to programs, including goals, strategies, and -obstacles, and because they were interesting to youth, the programs continue to use these materials.

Benefits to Researchers and Scholarship

Researchers are especially interested in the theoretical relevance of data and the application of findings beyond the immediate community in which data are collected. Partnerships of the sort we pursued enhance the ecological and external validity of studies of programs and lead to theoretical advances based on the ideas, questions, and cultures of program staff and participants (Cooper et al., in press).

When researchers develop relationships with program staff and youth and their families, their research is more likely to reflect views of members of the community, including hard-to-reach youth (Small, 1996). Because we volunteered extensively and became part of the program "family," we had regular opportunities to listen to youth perspectives, which in turn helped us find common interests and relevant questions. Partnerships with community members also helped us bridge the cultural, racial, ethnic, and social class divisions that too often stand in the way of incorporating participants' perspectives in research.

Research on community-level risks and opportunities benefits from data we collected on individuals' perceptions of programs and communities. For example, our findings build on studies that emphasize the importance of social support and services for low-income youth (Price, Cioci, Penner, & Trautlein, 1993). Working closely with program staff and participants alerted us to how youth actively negotiate and create resources (Denner, Lopez, Cooper, & Dunbar, 1998) and helped us better understand the key contexts of child development.

Working with program staff also led to an expanded theoretical model to include young adults and siblings who youth reported act as culture brokers between different settings (Cooper et al., in press). As a program director, one partner had already built on her masters' thesis in education on parent involvement. With our team she developed a hypothesis that another factor contributing to program effectiveness involves students' peers. She reasoned that the program could help youth find friends who share their dreams of college and college-based careers and that such friends can help one another achieve their goals. Our team surveyed students on these issues at the program Summer Institute and then held focus groups with students at the next program Saturday academy, showing them graphs of our findings. They explained why they had friends for whom school was important. We also asked youth what questions they would like the research team to ask at the next Summer Institute, where we will continue these activities.

Staff in the other program helped us understand that programs provide a place of belonging that is an alternative to joining a gang, and that programs allow youth to be with others who share their goals and concerns. Staff also helped us identify different subgroups of youth who need different kinds of services, including those who come to learn, those who come to see friends, and those who come because a parent is insisting. And staff helped us recognize the role of culture in sibling care, the protection of young children, gender roles, and parent-child relationships.

Benefits to Policymakers

Finally, because university-community partnerships encompass a range of perspectives and strategies, they offer valuable information to policymakers. Our findings speak to three key policy issues: resource underutilization, program replication, and maintenance of an open academic pipeline for ethnically diverse youth.

Many youth programs are underutilized (McLaughlin et al., 1994). Our findings on why youth participate in programs-including relationships with staff, fun, learning, and safety-provide a kind of formative evaluation that can be useful to policymakers, funders, and planners in improving programs. In addition, our findings suggest that low-income and minority youth and their families have hopes and dreams for the future and seek guidance on how to reach those dreams.

Program replication becomes possible when research reveals practices that could be helpful to other programs (Oden, 1995; Weiss, 1998). We set out to discover not only what programs are doing, but also how and why their services make a difference. To do this we needed to spend time listening to, observing, and trying out roles to understand how the programs were run. Building long-term partnerships with program staff is necessary to see which program elements make a difference (e.g., staff, activities, community investment, etc.)

Relationships and communication among staff influence what happens in a program. The most effective activities were those that built on youth strengths and matched their interests (such as allowing friends or siblings to attend program activities and work on projects together); were sensitive to developmental differences; built on existing relationships between staff and participants; and involved a willingness on the part of staff to be available after hours (e.g., for follow-up phone calls and transportation).

Challenges to Successful Partnerships and Good Research

Several factors can inhibit successful partnerships and the generation of valid research findings. Collecting data in a community setting presents a special challenge (Archer et al.,

1992; Groark & McCall, 1996). The following are common problems university-community partnerships confront:

Unclear Boundaries

Partnerships may blur boundaries between the research effort and the program. Researchers in the field face challenges similar to those faced by anthropologists in conducting field-based research (Lofland & Lofland, 1995); such challenges include whether to cross the line between observing and participating. Because program staff are often pressed to focus on service delivery and funding (Groark & McCall, 1996), they may try to enlist researchers to help with teaching, supervising, and transporting children, organizing field trips, or seeking funds. Researchers may also be asked to write grants or give presentations on behalf of the program. Although some of these activities may be appropriate, difficulties can arise when mutual roles are ill defined or when staff are asked to perform tasks they are not funded to do. Similarly, researchers may make demands on staff for data collection that takes time away from direct service to youth.

Problems of Organization and Management

Programs and universities are each in a constant state of development that includes staff turnover and ongoing differences of opinion between staff. Researchers can find themselves in the middle of miscommunications; between staff and supervisors when factions exist within a program. In addition, when program practices are at odds with stated goals or missions, this creates problems for researchers trying to frame pertinent research questions. Likewise, a research team that lacks good communication and trust can send conflicting messages to the program. The research questions generated with the community may require the university team to seek assistance from experts outside their discipline, a difficult task at some universities.

Disparate Goals

Program staff and researchers may differ in what they want to accomplish in a collaboration. For example, program staff may not understand university requirements for informed consent; they may want researchers to investigate topics or survey children without informed consent. On the other hand, programs may want to protect the identities of participants who are legally vulnerable. Some programs do not have the time or resources to take on a university-sponsored project, or they may want results more quickly than is practical for completing data collection, entry, and analysis. Doing research in partnership takes time, and university-based researchers may have difficulty justifying the meetings, volunteer work in the community, and reports written for the community, if their institution rewards research productivity but not outreach. And stakeholders such as funders can also affect how well a collaboration works (Groark & McCall, 1996) when the research questions change in response to funders' concerns.

Different Priorities

University researchers may not be familiar with program practices or the community. They may violate social norms by not allowing youth to work together or by expecting the same youth to return to the program every day or attend all program activities. They may come with assumptions about the value of a formal education, while program staff may stress the importance of participants' ability to deal with their situation or "street smarts."

Program staff are typically not trained in research methods. They may not understand the importance of rigorous experimental design or of keeping accurate records. Planning can

be difficult if methods conflict with the tenets of staff who run the program (Langman & McLaughlin, 1993). For example, staff may, understandably, put interests of participants ahead of the research schedule by taking a field trip on a day researchers plan to collect data.

Resistance and Suspicion

All parties may have concerns about the collaboration. Programs may fear research will reveal weaknesses. Partners may find meetings mutually frustrating or irrelevant, particularly if staff, youth, or researchers do not feel their views are being heard or respected (Langman & McLaughlin, 1993), or if they feel they are being told what they already know. Programs that are designed to ameliorate structural inequalities or discrimination in a community may view the university as part of the problem.

Resources for Successful Partnerships

Trust and agreed-upon boundaries are two key elements of successful partnerships. In some cases, partners have written memoranda that specify a time line and identify steps to accountability and documented success. Successful collaborations pose a question that can be answered with trust and participation of both sides (Langman & McLaughlin, 1993). They have a clear contact person in both the community and the university, and ideally some parties will be part of both the university and the community program, for instance, as staff or board members. For continuity and sustainability, both partners must be involved in fund raising and resource development (Fitzgerald & Abrams, 1997).

Universities have developed several strategies for building university-community partnerships into their administrative structure. The University of California at Santa Cruz has established the Center for Educational Partnerships, which in turn collaborates with "vertical teams" of elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, community colleges, and universities, as well as community organizers and academic outreach programs, to strengthen access of diverse groups to the academic pipeline (Moran, 1999). The University of Minnesota has a consortium that develops and sustains collaborations with local communities (Weinberg & Erickson, 1996). The Office of Child Development at the University of Pittsburgh links funding, research, and programs on issues related to children, youth, and families (McCall, Groark, Strauss, & Johnson, 1995). Departments of applied developmental science promote faculty and student work in partnership with local communities (Fisher & Osofsky, 1997; Fisher, Rau, & Colapietro, 1993; Fitzgerald et al., 1996; Lemer, 1995). Many of these collaboratives utilize University Extension, a nationwide system that has been in place in land-grant universities since the late 1800s. Cooperative extension agents serve as liaisons to the National 4-H Youth Council to create formalized university- community partnerships (Snider & Miller, 1993) and a strong research agenda for their experiential youth programs.

Finally, and perhaps paradoxically, social and political change can create common goals that spark new partnerships on behalf of youth. For example, California Proposition 209 and the University of California Regents' SP-1 removed affirmative action for university admission as a legal remedy for the underrepresentation of ethnic minority youth in college. This policy change has prompted the development of new coalitions of educators, families, business leaders, and federal and state agencies to strengthen the ethnic diversity of students along the "academic pipeline" from kindergarten to college. University-community partnerships with community organizations, business partners, religious leaders, families, schools, and youth are building long-term, sustainable partnerships that reach across cultural and ethnic lines. At the state and national level, these coalitions are also linking private grant makers for children and families with public funders and policymakers. One example is the

Fannie Mae Foundation's recent funding for fifteen universities to work in partnership with communities on housing development.

In conclusion, research can play a key role in how social service programs and youth programs are designed, funded, and run. But this will not happen as long as research is conducted in settings far removed from the venues of service delivery or university researchers confine outreach to simply "giving science away." University-community research partnerships hold promise for all stakeholders and provide potential solutions to the social divisions that split our nation and other democracies (Garcia Coll et al., 1997). These partnerships will attain increased success as we gain greater understanding of the steps needed to build and sustain them.

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Social Policy Report (ISSN 1075-7031) is published four times a year by the Society for Research in Child Development. Its purpose is twofold: (1) to provide policymakers with objective reviews of research findings on topics of current national interest, and (2) to inform the SRCD membership about current policy issues relating to children and about the state of relevant research.

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