Establishing the criteria for ‘good practice’: Evaluating a model of a university-community knowledge partnership at the University of Cape Town (UCT)

Janice McMillan, Suki Goodman & Tanja Winkler
University of Cape Town

INTRODUCTION

2008
• July 2008 new Vice Chancellor (VC) appointed - UCT embarked on strategic planning process culminating in new Mission and Strategic Plan
• New strategic goals reflect UCT’s intention play a role in better addressing the pressing social, economic and developmental problems facing South Africa & to enhance impact of its research
• Already exist a number of initiatives but need was identified for visible mechanism for communities to access university resources

2010
• August 2010: UCT Knowledge Co-op (KC) established in to act as a bridge between society and UCT to help broker new partnerships
• Key feature is centralized broker who mediates and negotiates projects
• UCT influenced by model of Science Shops in Europe and other parts of the world

2012
• To date (2012): 19 projects across all faculties

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Origins of research project:
• Science Shop model - little is known about its implementation in South Africa
• Research set up in 2010 with funds from National Research Foundation (NRF)
• Received 3 years of funding 2011-2013
• Team consists of colleagues from diverse disciplines

The research & evaluation project addresses the following questions:
• What is the model currently used by the Knowledge Co-op (KC)?
• How effective is the current model in brokering research partnerships? How did the model conceived actually work in practice?
• Does the Knowledge Co-op provide an enabling environment for social responsiveness and add value to the work undertaken at UCT?
• What are key lessons learned for ensuring KC builds on its initial successes, and what recommendations might be made for enhancing social responsiveness work at UCT?

Research outcomes:
• To illuminate & understand complex relationships of interaction that occur in university-community partnerships
• To provide insight into theoretical frameworks that can be used in similar contexts

Evaluation outcomes will focus on understanding
• How well the KC model works
• How effective it is in opening access to the university and helping to establish guiding principles for mutually beneficial reciprocal partnerships in the future
• The strengths and challenges of the brokering role

CONCLUSIONS:

Researching practice as it develops is a critical element in both understanding and shaping complex initiatives such as university-community knowledge partnerships. While not always feasible, we believe it presents an example of ‘good practice’.

RESERACH PROCESS

• Literature review of Science Shops, community engagement and university-community engagement in South Africa undertaken (Penfold and Goodman 2011)
• Primary research methodology is qualitative
• Quantitative component has focused on analysis of the use of KC website

The research sites

19 KC projects so far since 2011; 9 selected for research project
2011 Sites
• Monitoring the uptake of ARVs: Dept. of Public Health and MSF
• Exploring ‘recovery journey’ of TB patients: Dept. of Anthropology, Public Health & MSF
• Designing a low cost fence: Dept. of Mechanical Engineering & New World Foundation
• Developing electronic database: Dept. of Information Systems & Epilepsy South Africa
• Exit strategies for prostituted women: Dept. of Psychology & Embrace Dignity

2012 Sites
• School Hall Design: Dept. of Architecture, Extra Mural Education Programme & Kameemeiyer school
• Computer training & website update: HOCIP (Dept. of Information Systems) & Children’s Resource Centre (CRC)
• Patients awaiting cancer treatment: Gender Studies & CANSA
• Absent male role models: Gender Studies (lecturer) & New World Foundation

Data collection
• To date more than 30 interviews have been conducted across the sites
• Interviewed all 3 constituencies across each project: staff, students & community
• Interviewed KC manager as seen as key ‘broker’ for the partnerships
• Interviewed senior members of the university involved in the conception of KC

Research questions for interviews
• Questions linked to theoretical frameworks emerging in our study
• ‘transaction spaces’ provide the means and processes by which macro, meso and micro concerns can ‘speak’ to higher education – as well as the means by which educators can ‘talk back’ to other contexts (Winberg 2006: 164)

RESULTS/PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

2011: Presented a paper at 5th Living Knowledge Conference Bonn 10-11 May 2011
2012: A code of good practice for engaged scholarship with external (non-academic) constituencies developed drawing from research on the Pilot projects in 2011
Preliminary findings indicate that KC has been successful in many of the partnerships

CONTACT: Janice McMillan janice.mcmillan@uct.ac.za