From Research to Action: Four Theories and Their Implications for Knowledge Mobilization

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Abstract
Integral to both knowledge mobilization and action research is the idea that research can and should ignite change or action. Change or action may occur at multiple levels and scales, in direct and predictable ways and in indirect and highly unpredictable ways. To better understand the relationship between research and action or change, we delineate four conceptualizations that appear in the literature. Reflecting on our experiences as collaborators in a community–university action research project that set out to tackle a "wicked" social problem, we consider the implications of these conceptualizations for the project's knowledge mobilization plans and activities. The major lessons point to the importance of building capacity by nurturing collaborative learning spaces, of drawing many others – situated differently and with varied perspectives – into dialogue, and of embracing change within the project itself.

Keywords
Action research; Capacity building; Collaborative entanglement; Community dialogue approach; Community-University research; Knowledge mobilization; Positive youth development; Systemic action research

Introduction
A rich literature exploring diverse conceptualizations and practices of action research emphasizes the importance of the co-creation of knowledge and its movement into action (Plumb, Collins, Cordeiro, & Kavanaugh-Lynch, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2006;

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Reid, Tom, & Frisby, 2006). Similarly, while there are multiple conceptualizations of knowledge mobilization, each reflects an express goal of ensuring that the research will have an impact, that it will make a difference (Nichols, Phipps, Provencal, & Hewett, 2013; Sá, Li, & Faubert, 2011; Levin, 2008; Bennet & Bennet, 2007). Drawing from our experiences in the *Assets Coming Together (ACT) for Youth* project, below we explore knowledge mobilization in the context of community–university action research projects. We delineate various assumptions and theories about how change happens, particularly within the context of complex, multi-layered, or "wicked" problems (Phipps, Jensen, & Meyers, 2012; Bennet & Bennet, 2007). In seeking to tease out these theories, we draw from Bennet & Bennet's (2007) conceptualization of knowledge mobilization as a process of "collaborative entanglement" (p. 48) and Burns' (2014) model of "systemic action research" (p 3).

The *ACT for Youth* project

ACT for Youth is a community–university research alliance that brings together academics and graduate students from several disciplines, youth interns, and some 27 community-based organizations, the majority of whom provide youth-focused/youth-led supports in Toronto's Jane-Finch community. The community site for the project is located in the city's northwest quadrant and close to York University (the institutional home of the project). In a recent evaluation of the city's 140 social planning neighhourhoods against an equity benchmark comprised of indicators of economic opportunity (unemployment, low income, receipt of social assistance), social development (high school graduation, marginalization, postsecondary education completion), participation in decision-making, physical surroundings, and healthy lives, the neighbourhood of Black Creek at the core of the Jane/Finch community received the lowest score (City of Toronto, 2014b). The equity gap is striking: whereas Black Creek scored 21.38, the highest ranked neighbourhood scored 92.05 (City of Toronto, 2014a). Significantly, 66 percent of residents in neighbourhoods scoring below the neighbourhood equity benchmark are visible minorities, leading the executive director of Social Development, Finance and Administration for the City of Toronto to conclude that "systemic racism is playing an important role in shaping Toronto's neighbourhoods" (City of Toronto, 2014b). As these scores reveal, the Jane-Finch community faces the structural challenges of poverty, social marginalization, and racism. The neighbourhood has also been widely depicted in the media as rife with violence, guns, and gangs; youth living in the neighbourhood have been depicted as "problems" who pose "risks" (Janes, Ibhawoh, Razack, & Gilbert, 2014). This depiction fuels deeply troubling stereotypes that shape and limit young people's opportunities (McMurtry & Curling, 2008; Mosher, 2008). Youth in the *ACT for Youth* project have vigorously contested this one-dimensional and often sensationalized depiction, and have rendered visible the community's many strengths, their own capacities, and their deep affection for their neighbourhoods.

The project expressly seeks to challenge an existing "deficient" and "risk"-based framing of youth and to draw from, and instill, a positive youth development (PYD) perspective that promotes youth assets (Nichols, Anucha, Houwer, & Wood, 2013; Levac, 2013). The PYD perspective challenges the "youth as problems" model and encourages the development of research, programs, and policies that create pathways to these assets within communities. *ACT for Youth* integrated this perspective with a social justice

approach, recognizing that youth in marginalized urban communities experience social, political, and economic forces, such as racism, sexism, poverty, zero-tolerance policies, and unemployment that are toxic to their well-being. The layering of social justice atop a PYD approach draws attention to the structures that impede the development of young people's capacities (Levac, 2013).

The *ACT for Youth* project proposed, most broadly and fundamentally, to facilitate the transformation of the Jane-Finch community into an asset-building community capable of supporting a PYD approach. Through a process involving more than 30 meetings with community organizations and a half-day community forum, more detailed objectives were identified: the generation of local-level data to educate various sectors of the community about the asset philosophy; the development of job training and job-seeking strategies for youth that promoted completion of high school and attendance at college and university; and the articulation of strategies to alter public discourse and the predominant media frames that foster the negative stereotypes that so profoundly shape the experiences and opportunities of youth (a framing that youth in the project named as a form of violence) (Ollner, Sekharan, Truong, & Vig, 2011). To further these objectives, five central research questions were developed:

1. What assets do youth in urban communities have and what are the possible ways that communities can increase their development using socializing systems within the community, including the family, neighbourhood, faith groups, school, youth organizations, and places of work? (Youth Survey Working Group)
2. What are the perspectives of youth in urban communities concerning their needs and wellbeing? What are their perspectives on youth-on-youth violence, how do they understand and experience this violence, and how does it impact their life? What are their explanations for violence and how do they think it should be responded to? (Youth Voices Working Group)
3. What are the diverse pathways of urban youth from high school into stable participation in the labour market? (Youth Economic Strategies Working Group)
4. How can communities reframe the negative public discourse about youth to one that is supportive of positive youth development policies anchored in solid research evidence? (Reframing Public Discourse Working Group)
5. How can we build a sustainable, equitable community–university research partnership that brings together a multi-sector alliance of community stakeholders (youth, academic scholars, and organizations from the non-profit, public, and for-profit sectors) to energize community assets that can support positive youth development within marginalized urban communities? (Program Evaluation and Monitoring Working Group)

Structurally, the project was organized to match these five questions, with a working group co-chaired by a community member and an academic assigned to each of the questions. The working groups, themselves comprised of academics and community members (including youth), developed the research methodologies best suited to answer their specific questions. The methodologies ranged from secondary data analysis, to surveys, focus groups, in-depth interviews, critical media discourse analysis, a photo-voice project and a traveling "speaker's corner." A research advisory group (composed of the co-chairs of the working groups), a youth-led sub-committee, and

the full partnership group filled in other dimensions of the overall structure. In addition, a Knowledge Mobilization and Communication Committee (KM/C) was in place from the outset and, like the working groups, was comprised of community members and academics. One of the authors of this article is the principal investigator of the project and has participated in virtually all of the working groups, two of the authors have co-chaired the project's KM/C committee, and another has been a student intern with the project and actively involved in the youth-led sub-committee.

Conceptualizing action and impact

As noted at the outset, integral to both knowledge mobilization and action research is the idea that research can and should ignite change, impact, or action. Reid, Tom, and Frisby (2006) have argued that, notwithstanding the centrality of "action" to action research, the meaning of the term has received relatively little attention. "Action," they suggest, needs to be understood as multi-faceted and dynamic, operating at multiple sites and scales. Action or change may register at the level of the individual collaborators (both community and academic), in communities or collectivities, in policy or practice domains, or on the ideational plane (Plumb et al., 2008; Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007; Reid, Tom, & Frisby, 2006).

Beyond pluralizing the domains in which we might pursue, observe, and seek to measure change, we also need to attend to the question of how change occurs. As Burns (2014) has posited, "[i]f action research is a process which is designed to stimulate emancipatory change, then it is important that practitioners of action research … understand how change happens" (p. 5). Below, we delineate four conceptualizations of how change occurs, and then, drawing from our experiences in the *ACT for Youth* project, we consider how these conceptualizations might be mapped onto particular knowledge mobilization strategies. These conceptualizations are by no means mutually exclusive, nor are they meant to constitute an exhaustive survey of all connections between research and change. While there are some clear differences between these conceptualizations, and indeed some marked tensions, they are also interrelated in multiple ways.

Knowledge implementation

One approach, found in both the knowledge mobilization and action research literatures, posits a relatively straightforward implementation – the movement into action (be it policy or practice) – of research findings, understood as fixed and transferable. Temporally, change or action occurs at the end of the research process. No doubt in some circumstances, particularly where research findings are actively sought by those who have already identified a readiness for change, change is accomplished in this straightforward, linear manner. We might, as Molas-Gallart and Tang (2011) have suggested, look to see whether the research has had an impact by asking whether a stakeholder has done new things or done things differently: has there been a "productive interaction" (p. 219)? In this framing, a direct causal link is drawn between research and change. This approach is likely to work best for "bounded problems" with relatively clear solutions (Gamble, 2008). But even here, it may be necessary to "translate" research findings in order to make them accessible and relevant to the intended audience, a process that requires skill and know-how. In other circumstances, although the research findings may be accessible and point unambiguously to

particular changes in policy or practice, a raft of factors often circumscribes the potential for change. These factors range from ingrained institutional practices, to costs, to cultural relevance, to other competing sources of knowledge, to purely political considerations (Levin, 2008; Dobbins, Rosenbaum, Plews, Law, & Fysh, 2007; Salsberg, Louttit, McComber, Fiddler, Naqshbandi, Receveur, Harris, & Macaulay, 2007). As such, strategies to move knowledge into action require anticipating these factors and, where possible, addressing them. It cannot be assumed that simply communicating research findings will have an impact or will generate change.

Capacity enhancement of collaborators

A second approach in conceptualizing how change occurs draws our attention to the research process itself and the potential to enhance the capacity of the research collaborators. Capacity building of the research collaborators is understood to be an integral component of community-based participatory research projects and is certainly acknowledged within strands of the knowledge mobilization literature (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). The notion of "capacity" is itself inflected with more particular possibilities, ranging from a narrow view focused on learning discrete pieces of knowledge or information, to the more expansive views characteristic of action research that include, for example, critical consciousness and empowerment.

In their work on knowledge mobilization, Bowen & Martens (2005) identify the new learning that occurs for research partners as an important conduit to impact. For community participants, this learning may include the acquisition of knowledge and skills related to research methodologies and the ability to critically evaluate research and purposefully question practice. For academic collaborators, learning may include new knowledge of the community, the appreciation of the varied perspectives and multiple forms of expertise of community members, and enhanced skill in establishing relationships of meaning (Bowen & Martens, 2005; Edwards, 2012). This mutual learning and capacity enhancement also helps to ensure the relevance of research questions, the quality of research instruments, and the likelihood that the research will result in changes to the practices or services of stakeholder participants (Sadler, Larson, Bouregy, LaPaglia, Bridger, McCaslin, & Rockwell, 2011; Plumb et al., 2008; Bowen & Martens, 2005; Suarez-Balcazar, Harper, & Lewis, 2005).

As suggested above, the possibilities are yet more capacious, encompassing political analysis and consciousness raising, finding voice, individual and collective empowerment, and leadership skills. Understood in this more expansive way, capacity building is linked to the liberation of consciousness and the possibility of not only individual action, but collective, political mobilization to demand from others – and to together create – change. In Reid, Tom, and Frisby's (2006) study with low-income women, for example, women spoke of their enhanced capacity to critique injustice and to be effective agents of change in their own lives and beyond.

Creating the spaces where these various forms of learning can occur and where these capacities can develop requires dedicated attention and resources. Both the knowledge mobilization and community-based action literatures identify the importance of early, ongoing and meaningful in-person dialogue and interaction in building the necessary foundation of trust (Phipps et al., 2012; Fenwick & Farrell, 2012; Molas-Gallart & Tang,

2011; Levin, 2008; Jacobson, 2007; Suarez-Balcazar, Harper, & Lewis, 2005). Establishing this foundation requires finding a way to move beyond skepticism (potentially held by all partners) and, in some instances, requires repairing a community's historically fraught experiences with academic researchers (Nichols et al., 2013; Suarez-Balcazar, Harper, & Lewis, 2005). Creating an environment of multi-directional learning in which all participants are open to new ideas, experience, and knowledge requires respect for diversity, explicit attention to how power is shared, and strong communication practices (Sadler et al., 2011; Flicker & Savan, 2008; Suarez-Balcazar, Harper, & Lewis, 2005). Values of participation, democratic inquiry, reciprocity, and empowerment are integral to the creation of productive learning spaces (Nichols, Anucha, Houwer, & Wood, 2013; Paradis & Mosher, 2012; Sadler et al., 2011; Paradis, 2009; Reid, Tom, & Frisby, 2006; Flicker & Savan, 2008; Suarez-Balcazar, Harper, & Lewis, 2005).

A range of common challenges in establishing such spaces of learning have been documented, particularly in the context of community–university alliances; among them are differences in purposes, expectations, time frames, scale, and access to power and resources (Nichols, Anucha, Houwer, & Wood, 2013; Sadler et al., 2011; Flicker & Savan, 2008; Suarez-Balcazar, Harper, & Lewis, 2005). In addition, particularly for large-scale projects with many participants and/or that extend for months or years, changes in membership that arise when participants secure new employment or when organizations shift their priorities can mean that partnerships are constantly being reconfigured, and relationships renegotiated (Plumb et al., 2008; Suarez-Balcazar, Harper, & Lewis, 2005).

Collaborative entanglement

A third conceptualization, while related to the second, deepens the theorization of knowledge co-creation, extending it beyond the research collaborators to include others drawn into conversation about the research. Rather than conceptualizing the intentional knowledge constructed through research methodologies as fixed and transferable, Bennet and Bennet (2007) describe a dynamic process in which the thoughts and behaviours proposed by researchers merge with and are altered by the thoughts and behaviours of others, including change agents and community actors. The intentional collision and interplay – not layering – of the expertise and perspectives of differently situated persons shapes what is "known" and by whom. Bennet and Bennet (2007) term these "mixing, entwining, and unpredictable associations" the process of "entanglement" (p. 18). Similarly, Fenwick and Farrell (2012) challenge a static concept of knowledge that is simply "mobilized," observing that as knowledge moves, it is "inevitably reconstituted with differently inflected meanings" (p. 3). In this process of knowledge construction, the boundaries of "producers" and "users" (or "production" and "use") are permeable and porous; change agents, community members, and others are as integral to the production of knowledge as are academic researchers, and all participants learn, benefit from, and, in some manner, "use" the knowledge of others. This conceptualization challenges the notion of separate domains of research and application, or of researchers and practitioners, that informs, for example, the first conceptualization explored above (Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

Integral to this conceptualization of "entanglement" is the notion of "collaboration," described by Bennet and Bennet (2007) as the facilitation "of the learning and sharing of knowledge through the *conscious development* of connections, relationships and flows of information" (p. 21, emphasis in original). This notion of collaboration offers, we suggest, a particularly helpful way of thinking about the construction of learning environments. In essence, it is collaboration that creates the possibility of entanglement. Important as well is the conceptualization of knowledge as "the capacity (potential or actual) to take effective action" (Bennet & Bennet, 2007, p. 24), a capacity that is created "whenever people are thinking, feeling, learning and interacting" (p. 19). Knowledge is active, not passive, the "source and energy of performance" that "builds and unleashes: ideas, energy, understanding, awareness, possibilities" (p. 27). Taken together, these ideas form a conceptualization of knowledge mobilization as a process (not an event) of "collaborative entanglement" (Bennet & Bennet, 2007). Conceptualized in this way, traces of impact or change may occur whenever and wherever ideas and thoughts are exchanged.

This understanding of knowledge suggests a particular theory of how participation in research may produce change. When people have the opportunity to come together, to share and debate ideas and learnings (including research findings), new knowledge – the capacity to take action – is produced. It is not merely that participants learn something more about research, or develop new capacities to use research (although these are important), but that the capacity to imagine new possibilities and to take action – to engage in new performance – is enhanced. The source of change is located not in the instrumental deployment of research findings but in the participants themselves. As Fenwick and Farrell (2012) suggest, knowledge may be more about empowering people and unleashing possibilities than the transference of "findings" or "innovations." In a similar vein, Reid, Tom, and Frisby (2006) observe that the seemingly local and isolated action of, for example, a project participant speaking to validate her experience of the world, may combine with life changes of others, and potentially contribute to structural or policy change.

Systemic action research

A fourth approach, building on the third, directs attention more specifically to how change occurs in relation to complex and seemingly intractable social issues whose roots are multiple and intertwined (Burns, 2014). Burns' articulation of systemic action research suggests the importance of a shift from a focus on "problems" to "systems." For Burns, a system is conceived as the "interconnections between people, processes and the environment in which they are situated" (p. 5), and it is these multiple interconnections and relationships that are the subject of inquiry. These connections and relationships are fluid and dynamic; change in one part of the system reverberates, often in unpredictable ways, elsewhere in the system. As such, we cannot expect change to unfold in a linear manner. Rather, change happens in "an iterative way – where one thing (or the interaction of many things) leads to another. This in turn interacts with new things, and creates new outcomes, and so the process goes on" (Burns, 2014, p. 5).

Burns' (2014) description of the discontinuous nature of change – of how, for example, problems may seem intractable, yet "[u]nder the surface, attitudes may be changing, innovations may be garnering support, and suddenly there is a 'phase change'" (p. 6) –

combines with the notion of "collaborative entanglement" to suggest insights into knowledge mobilization. We might imagine constructing a knowledge mobilization strategy designed to maximize opportunities for contact – for sharing, interacting, and learning – between those involved in the research collaboration and a host of actors variously placed within the system of inquiry. As traces of impact proliferate, the potential that new ideas may catch hold is enlarged.

Our ability in this context to make assertions about a causal link between a particular social impact and a specific research undertaking is exceptionally limited. As Burns (2014) explains, while it may be possible to look back in time and observe causal relationships, it is impossible to predict them in advance, "because we cannot know how things will change with each iteration, and what choices will open up" (p. 6). Our traditional, linear, cause-and-effect models of thinking about impact need be jettisoned in favour of attention to the processes "in which knowledge and expertise circulates to achieve certain goals that are deemed relevant for the development of society" (Spaapen & van Drooge, 2011, p. 212). As Spaapen and van Drooge (2011) point out, ordinarily "in order to have impact you've got to have contact" (p. 213) between researchers and stakeholders. What follows from that contact is hard to predict, as research findings enter into the "dynamic process of actions and interactions between different stakeholders" (p. 213). But it is through these interactions that change and social innovation occur.

That impact may be unpredictable does not, however, signal pure randomness. Here, Burns (2014) offers us further insights. Significantly, he suggests that to facilitate system change, multiple simultaneous inquiries need be pursued, and later connected horizontally and vertically, to seek out patterns and to "enable learning to travel across the system" (p. 8). Such inquiries must involve people with differing – indeed divergent – perspectives on the issues. Although our inclination may be to seek out persons and institutions with similar values and interests, system change requires not that we neglect these connections, but that we move beyond them. It is when an issue, a story, or a framework "resonates" across differently situated groups that we have found the sweet spot, the real opportunity for system change. Burns' systemic action research approach, unlike much of the action research literature, embraces dynamic, rather than stable, group membership; a membership that fluctuates as connections or resonances are made between parallel inquiry processes and new lines of inquiry are opened up.

Similar ideas found in the developmental evaluation literature might also offer insights into conceptualizations of knowledge mobilization in addressing complex, seemingly intractable problems. Developmental evaluation proceeds from the premise that while the stepped and linear process of formative and summative evaluations works well in many contexts, it is ill-suited for complex system environments where social innovation is sought. The description of these environments as having a destination that is "a notion rather than a crisp image" and as having an unclear path forward (Gamble, 2008, p. 13) aptly applies to many community-based action research projects, *Act for Youth* included. What may be particularly relevant to take away from the developmental evaluation literature is the importance of embracing, rather than resisting, the reality that the path, the destination, and the players are constantly evolving. To embrace this requires ongoing flexibility (in project and methodological

design, in partnership membership, and in knowledge mobilization strategies) and experimentation (an iterative approach). This insight is consistent with an understanding of action research as, itself, an emergent process that shifts and changes as research collaborators develop their skills and capacities in critical inquiry and knowledge production (Reason & Bradbury, 2006).

ACT for Youth and knowledge mobilization

The *ACT for Youth* project was framed by the "community dialogue approach" (CDA) developed by the principal investigator (Anucha, Dlamini, Yan, & Smylie, 2006). This approach, a species of the action research family, re-imagines *research as a community dialogue* and *community engagement as a methodological practice*. The six-stage CDA is centred on equitable collaborations with community stakeholders during all phases of the research process, from defining the focus of the research to dissemination and translation of the research findings. The CDA acknowledges the multiple memberships of community and allows for the inclusion of multiple voices by emphasizing multi-methods/multi-focal research.

The role of the Knowledge Mobilization and Communication Committee (KM/C) was initially understood to be that of facilitating dialogue within the partnership and between the partnership and a range of other actors and institutions. At the outset of the project, we imagined its role to be much like that of a traffic officer, keeping tabs on the planned knowledge mobilization activities within each of the research working groups, sharing information and ideas across the partnership, keeping a watchful eye on the distribution of activities over time, and facilitating the development of research themes that cut across multiple research working groups. Our thinking was embedded in a very linear track, assuming a logical procession of knowledge generation, "product" release or communication of findings, and an implicit assumption that change would follow.

As the project progressed, our thinking about knowledge mobilization evolved, and we embarked upon a more deliberative and strategic path. We devoted the better part of a day-long partnership meeting to the exploration of concepts of knowledge mobilization with a view to developing a shared conception for the project and crafting a knowledge mobilization plan. We identified maximizing opportunities for enlarging capacity – of both individuals and organizations – as central to the project's conceptualization of knowledge mobilization. Through the conversation, a variety of opportunities for capacity building were identified: the introduction to new skills; the development and application of existing skills in new contexts; the improvement of practices (individual and organizational); and the creation of space to engage with others, to learn and to share our learning.

We developed a template (attached as Appendix 1) that each working group filled in during the meeting to identify the key findings of the group's research and to match the following with each finding: the audiences that needed to know that finding, what the project hoped the audience would do with the finding, the approach or method most likely to engage each audience, the challenges and barriers the project might face in reaching each audience, the skills needed within the project to reach the desired audience, and our potential allies and partners. As each group reported back, we filled the template in on an overhead. From this, we identified common audiences, strategies,

and skill gaps in reaching audiences. In the latter category, we prioritized the skill gaps needed to reach our audiences – or, to borrow from Bennett et al. (2007), the "integrative competencies … that provide connective tissue" (p. 70) – that had been most consistently identified by the groups. From this process, three integrative competencies were prioritized: the use of social media, critical discourse analysis, and policy advocacy. Our plan – yet to be fully realized – was to develop workshops (and here we envisioned youth interns developing and leading the social media and critical discourse workshops) that would be repeatable and scalable in each of these areas and to make them available not only to the partnership but to the wider community.

The plan that emerged bore elements of the first and second conceptualizations of the relationship between research undertakings and change discussed in the previous section. Consistent with the "implementation of knowledge" approach and its embrace of a linear progression of knowledge production and translation, the plan identified – but in a more systematic way than previously – the audiences we desired to reach and the barriers we anticipated encountering. Perhaps more significantly, the conversations had served to deepen our appreciation of the links between our research process, our project's goal of capacity-building, and knowledge mobilization. The project had recognized from the outset that the research process was integrally connected to the project's outcome (shifting to an asset-based view of youth); as such, youth capacity-building and the conscious modelling of an asset-based approach were key aspects of the project's design. Yet it was only later that we explicitly identified capacity building as integrally connected to knowledge mobilization.

In so doing, we shifted the temporal location of knowledge mobilization from a discrete, end-stage activity to an ongoing and embedded one. This evolution in our thinking about knowledge mobilization also reminded us of the importance of nurturing spaces for learning and capacity building not only for youth, but for all project partners. A mid-project reflexive evaluation of our project process that occurred a short time later confirmed that we needed to do more to nurture these spaces. While there were some positive examples of important learning across difference (especially in resolving tensions surrounding research instruments), both youth and community partners had not experienced equitable participation in the project and important learning opportunities had been missed (Nichols, Anucha, Houwer, & Wood, 2013).

The community dialogue approach that frames our project emphasizes a commitment to an ongoing and active knowledge mobilization and communication (KM/C) strategy that targets both academic (including students) and community stakeholders (practitioners; policymakers; community members, including youth). Our KM/C plan targets these diverse audiences using multiple communication channels through both academic and community project members. Although the project has a KM/C plan, we have also been reflexive and flexible in our approach so we can take advantage of opportunities that unexpectedly arise. The culture and structure of *ACT for Youth* was created to privilege community and youth in the field of research. In addition to the dissemination activities listed in our plan, youth and community members have been heavily involved in the more traditional research dissemination activities, such as refereed publications and presentations. Community co-chairs, partnership members,

and youth have been active in the publication, writing, and planning of academic journal articles, as well as articles more relevant to policy and programmatic affairs. The publication guidelines that we developed and adopted early in the partnership provided us with guidelines on how to equitably share the fruits of research processes.

From the many knowledge mobilization activities undertaken, we provide here a few examples to illustrate how knowledge mobilization practices might be aligned with the four conceptualizations of the relationship between research and change or impact. Consistent with the knowledge implementation approach were meetings with local schools to discuss particular findings. The Youth Survey Working Group undertook a survey of youth in grades 6–12 in five of the six middle and high schools in the community and in three high schools outside of the community that are attended by students who reside in the Jane-Finch area. The project mailed a total of 4,563 consent letters in nine languages to parents and students in the respective schools. A total of 1,756 students were granted permission to participate, of which 1,706 completed the working group's *Survey of Student Resources and Assets*. In the end, 1,592 of the surveys were usable. Data from the survey, which combined two frameworks for positive human development, offered a rich portrait of the assets and resources of youth in Jane-Finch, which helped the project understand the challenges youth face and the supports they engage to overcome them. A key finding was that youth self-reported a marked decline in their access to various assets (non-familial adult relationships and opportunities for community engagement, for example) as they transitioned from middle school to high school. Teachers were identified as a key audience who needed to know about these findings, and a Lunch and Learn series was settled upon as a format that would be accessible and conducive to dialogue. Very spirited discussions followed on the implications of the findings for success in high school and for youth pathways to postsecondary education. Consistent with the knowledge implementation approach, research findings generated through the project had been shared with a strategically selected audience who we hoped might do new things or do things differently.

A significant amount of activity focused on the second conceptualization, capacity building with youth participants. This goal was pursued in a variety of ways through the project: youth from the community were recruited and trained (though paid internships and summer community-based research institutes), with a view to building their capacities to undertake, evaluate, and utilize research; to assume roles as leaders and agents of change; and to imagine postsecondary education as a viable future pathway. Each working group had youth members, and as noted, a youth-led committee formed part of the overall governance structure. Youth participated in the design and implementation of various research instruments, analyzed data, organized a youth-led research conference, and blogged research findings (Nichols, Anucha, Houwer, & Wood, 2013; Houwer, Anucha, Verrilli, & Wilkinson, n.d.). A modified "most significant outcome" evaluation of the internship program showed an increase in self-efficacy and self-awareness and a greater appreciation of possibilities for the future among the youth interns (Nichols, Anucha, Houwer, & Wood, 2013; Houwer et al., n.d.). Access to previously inaccessible space (York University), relational and social networks that included graduate student research assistants, and engaged learning/research processes were key to these outcomes (Houwer et al., n.d.). These shifts in how youth think about themselves are fundamentally important impacts of

the research process. The youth participating in the project also reported that the structure of the project was too top-down, and that they wanted more opportunities to take on their own research projects and to work more directly with academics. In other words, they showed that adults in the project were sometimes complicit in underestimating the potential of youth, and that issues of power require constant attention. This observation serves as a reminder that capacity building, like knowledge, flows in multiple directions through a variety of social processes.

Informed by the findings from the *Survey of Student Resources and Assets*, the project developed a research to action project: *New Opportunities for Innovative Student Engagement (NOISE) for Social Change*. The goal of NOISE was to pilot a model for enhancing the academic success of youth from the Jane-Finch community by providing them with *engaged learning* opportunities that energize and support their *civic engagement and psychosocial well-being*. The model was informed by research that shows that providing high school youth with expanded learning opportunities, which enable experiential learning in out-of-school settings and meaningful connections with adults and peers, can support school engagement and academic achievement (Harris, Deschenes, & Wallace, 2011). The first pilot of NOISE was in 2012/2013 with 40 Jane-Finch youth fellows and 40 social work student fellows who worked together in eight pods on community social action projects relevant to contemporary sociopolitical and socioeconomic conditions in the Jane-Finch community. An MSW graduate assistant facilitated each pod. The social action projects ground academic concepts in real-world contexts and allow the youth and students to learn from each other and from faculty. The NOISE model offers an innovative approach to mentorship and learning that differs from conventional mentorship models that operate within a deficit framework, whereby the mentor-mentee relationship aims to repair perceived shortfalls among people who are socially excluded. NOISE prioritizes multi-directional learning and accountability among *all* participants in the pod and recognizes that youth and students within a pod contribute important skills and experiences and mutually benefit from the multi-directional relationships. By bringing together youth from Jane-Finch and students and faculty from York, NOISE creates the space for relationships to form across difference, allows for knowledge of experiences to cross traditional boundaries, and gives the participants an experience of collaborative problem solving, shared power and decision-making. NOISE is now running for the third year, and in 2015/2016, NOISE will be piloted in another school of social work in another part of the province. An early evaluation indicates that NOISE has opened up learning spaces for the sharing of different perspectives, has facilitated civic engagement, and has enhanced psychosocial well-being (Houwer et al., n.d.).

While the plan envisioned a strategic and intentional drawing of others into the process, we were not explicitly working from an understanding of collaborative entanglement, nor did we have an articulated theory of how such interactions might produce change. Had we had this framing from the outset, we may have planned things differently, yet we do think some of the project's activities – especially those led by youth – offer some excellent examples of the change potential of collaborative entanglements. Significantly, the youth led subcommittee planned a number of knowledge mobilization activities, including a student led conference. For the conference (attended by some 300 students from local high schools), youth distilled the

research findings into ten key messages that resonated most loudly for them. These messages, or as the youth described them, the "top ten truths about our community," included: We're NOT Who You Might Think; We WANT to Be a Part of Our Community; We LOVE Our Neighbourhoods; We DESERVE Opportunities for Thriving, Not Just Surviving; and We TELL Stories, We Make Change. They narrowed these to five truths for the conference T-shirts so that the 300 conference participants could all carry forward – literally on their backs – these key messages. The "Yell the Truth" contest, announced at the conference, was intended to draw youth further into an understanding of the research findings and also to engage them in the process by challenging them to find innovative ways to communicate these findings to their peers.

Both the conference and NOISE have brought significant numbers of young people, situated in a variety of social places and spaces, into the process of entanglement. While it is not possible to track a direct causal link between these entanglements and changes in policies or practices, at some future time it may be possible to make a few more modest claims. As Spaapen and van Drooge (2011) suggest, we might track (indirectly) the impact of research by analyzing the process – the many moments of "coming together" to discuss research findings – and what is "unleashed" or what transpires as a result. We might also claim, consistent with Burns' (2014) account of systems change, that as knowledge is shared and developed among an expanding group of participants, momentum may build toward embracing new approaches: ideas catch on; they build on each other, have an energy of their own, and precisely when, where, and how they will land cannot be predicted in advance. What might the impact be, for example, of 300 youths discussing research findings about their community for a day; of having new and positive frames on their T-shirts; or of seeing other young people as producers of knowledge alongside academics and graduate students?

Over the course of the five years of the project (2009–2014; extended to 2015), and consistent with Burns' (2014) description of systems, much was shifting in the complex social and political terrain in which the project was situated. In a modest way, but without a deeply informed systems analysis, the project responded to some of these changes. New actors were emerging, as were new interventions in relation to youth, and youth violence in particular. As debates, discussion, and advocacy around issues of race and policing were unfolding in real time, *ACT for Youth* added a new research project. A postdoctoral student in geography undertook a detailed mapping of the City of Toronto that compared police stops based on race (police use the categories of Black, Brown, and White) and the racial composition census tracts for Toronto. The finding of this project – that there were higher rates of stoppages of Black and Brown youth, particularly when they were "out of place" (in downtown Toronto, for example) – resonated with other project data and was highly relevant to an ongoing community dialogue on policing in Jane-Finch and beyond (Meng, 2014). In the summer of 2014, *ACT for Youth* was able to broker a collaboration with a research consultant who was hired by the Toronto Police Services Board to conduct a study on community–police relations in communities around York University. The consultant hired and trained 14 of the youth who are involved with NOISE to participate in a survey of 400 community stakeholders. The project provided them with an excellent experience in how solutions to local issues are developed. After the release of the project's report, they have been following the process of how research can be mobilized for action and change. They

have become involved in tweeting and posting posts on Facebook about the findings from the report.

The systemic action research approach suggests opportunities for improvement in the design of the *ACT for Youth* project and its knowledge mobilization activities. There was scope for greater linkages between the research groups, more experimentation, and the active recruitment of a wider range of system actors with differing perspectives. There are, however, a number of factors that impeded this, ranging from the limited resources available to closely monitor changes within a complex system of many moving parts, to accountability to funders to undertake and produce what has been promised in applications for funding. Indeed, the mid-project evaluation highlighted a tension between the research plans set out in the project proposal and emergent project ideas from youth participants (Nichols, Anucha, Houwer, & Wood, 2013, p. 65).

Toward the end of the project, we found ourselves occupying the space so common to research action projects: out of funding and searching for a viable plan for sustaining the work the project had begun. We had hours of conversation about how to sustain the project's work. We debated the creation of a campaign, replete with glossy brochures and a pithy, catchy slogan. We considered how the project might build upon already established relationships with a broad array of community alliances and youth-focused initiatives that could continue the conversations about the research findings, their meaning, and their implementation. The creation of NOISE, described earlier, has thus far been our most affirmative answer to these difficult questions.

Conclusion

As we have discussed, the relationship between research and action or change can be understood in multiple ways. The four conceptualizations we have identified each offer insights into project design and approaches to knowledge mobilization. In some instances, particularly with careful attention to the audience to be reached, research has the potential to be moved into action in a relatively direct way, with predictable results. For many projects, a focus will be on building the capacities of the project collaborators. To do this well requires the conscious nurturing of collaborative spaces of productive learning (such as those created through NOISE). The concepts of collaborative entanglement and systemic action research suggest that, especially in tackling wicked problems, research projects must draw into the conversation a multiplicity of actors with varied (indeed divergent) perspectives and must themselves embrace change – in membership, in the focus of inquiry, and in methodology. These latter conceptualizations of the relationship between research and change suggest that while we can generate intentional knowledge through research, and while we can plan multiple opportunities to broaden collaborative entanglements beyond the partners to the research project, we ultimately cannot control – nor should we desire to control – the trajectories or the range of impacts of these entanglements. We can seed ideas, but how they grow, and what changes they ultimately spawn, cannot be fully known in advance or clearly traced retrospectively. We can design our research and knowledge mobilization processes in ways that maximize opportunities to develop the capacities of all participants to become agents of change, and this may be the most important legacy.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1

Knowledge	Knowledge/Key findings
Audience	Who Do We Want the Knowledge to Reach/Audience
Function	Function — What would we want this audience to do with the knowledge?
KM/C methods	How will we most effectively reach this audience? What tool/method?
Challenges and resources	What obstacles might we anticipate and how can we address them?
Time frame and act lead	What is our time frame? Who will take the lead?
Skills	What skills will we need to reach the audience? What is our plan to provide this skill training and to make the training known to our partners?
Allies/partners	Who will be involved?

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