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# Redefining the Lines of Expertise: Educational Pathways Through the Communities Together Advocacy Project

Mary D. Burbank, Rosemarie Hunter, and Leticia Alvarez Gutiérrez

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## Abstract

The profiles of American communities are among the most dynamic in recent history. This qualitative study examines collaboration between an urban community and The University of Utah. The Communities Together Advocacy Project illustrates parents' perspectives on the effectiveness of an advocacy training program and their subsequent leadership roles within a community. Findings speak to parent advocates as critical stakeholders in community-university partnerships.

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The profiles of American communities are among the most dynamic in recent history. Nationally, nearly one-third of school-age children are cultural minorities with 16% of the teaching force from non-majority populations (Clewell & Villegas, 1998; Hodgkinson, 2002; Kane & Orsini, 2005; Su, 1997; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Projections for the next 20 years identify dramatic changes in national demographics with 61% of population increases among Latino and Asian communities (Hodgkinson, 2002; Stanford, 1999; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

One western U.S. community has embraced the opportunity to respond to demographic shifts in substantive ways. For Salt Lake City, demographic movements reflect an increase of 117% in its population of people of color between 1990 and 2000 (Perlich, 2002), where one in three new residents was a member of a community of color, the Latino population more than doubled, and the primary urban school district reported its non-majority student population at 53% (2010 district census data).

Improving the Pre-K–16 educational experiences in Salt Lake City has been a primary goal of The University of Utah, the Salt Lake City School District, and members of a surrounding community. In 2000, a community outreach director at the University brought together stakeholders to bridge pathways to higher education for traditionally underrepresented students. A five-year initiative identified multiple avenues for supporting success in Pre-K–16 education and, ultimately, accessing higher education.

This study examined the ways in which collaboration between an institution of higher education, an urban school district, and a local community builds upon the insights of stakeholders to improve the Pre-K–16 experiences

of students and their families. In this study we attended specifically to the experiences of parent advocates as partners in building pathways to higher education. We describe a model for working with parent advocates and discuss the perspectives of project participants through a Community-Based Research partnership (CBR) (Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker, & Donohue, 2003). Specifically, the roots of CBR are embedded within campus-community partnerships where the partnerships work collectively to meet common goals (Buys & Bursnall, 2007; Campbell, 1999; Kemmis, 1995). Within the present study, parents were given platforms for working with educational stakeholders through the Communities Together Advocacy Project (CTAP). The successes and limitations of the project are presented and our plans for future efforts discussed.

## Theoretical Framework

Comprehensive community-based family support programs in both rural and urban areas support healthy family functioning and allow for greater family participation in larger educational systems (Bellah, Madson, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985). Examples of family support programs are found in social, school-based, religious, and community-based programs (Bellah, et al., 1985; Dryfoos, 2002, 2003; Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002; Friedman, 2007; Kagan & Weissbourd, 1994; Kronick, 2005). Many school districts keep school buildings open for extended hours and have co-located and integrated education, health, job-training, and recreation services to recreate school settings as community centers. These opportunities expand our definitions of education and broaden opportunities for dialogue across multiple stakeholders (Ames & Farrell, 2005; Maurrassee, 2001; Schor & Gorski, 1995).

The traditional characteristics of CBR include somewhat nontraditional researchers and participants in their examinations of communities (Israel, Krieger, Vlahov, Ciske, Foley, Fortin, Guzman, Lichtenstein, McGranaghan, Palermo, & Tang, 2006). That is, CBR community stakeholders work jointly with traditional researchers to identify common issues worthy of investigation, with the goal of reaching greater social justice and institutional reform.

Our study embraces the tenets of building reciprocal relationships between researchers and community members and is focused on multiple perspectives that reflect the historical and cultural experiences of families and the “funds of knowledge” within communities (Mitchell & Bryan 2007; Rishel, 2008; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). The experiences and skills that families bring to communities are validated by formalizing the knowledge-sharing role of residents in their neighborhoods and schools. The community-based support of CTAP provided avenues for families to engage in ongoing resident participation, relationship building, and community-driven action.

## **CTAP**

In 2001, CTAP emerged when the University rallied its faculty to work in partnership with local schools, community agencies, and area residents to identify and illuminate pathways to higher education for traditionally underrepresented students. CTAP reflects three consecutive years of implementation where each year represents a phase in the evolution of reciprocity between a community and an institution of higher education. In its early years, CTAP brought together university faculty, representatives from community organizations, and parents through a series of workshops. These information exchanges provided platforms designed to empower parents concerning their students’ education and schooling experiences. The goal of the workshop series was one dimension of a larger CTAP specifically designed to open dialogue between families and the community. CTAP workshops provided opportunities for family stakeholders to examine the tools necessary for navigating public education, with the ultimate goal of sharing perspectives with members of their respective communities (i.e., families, local, university).

During the first year, 2005–2006, two workshop series provided 32 community members with education-related topics for parents and families

delivered first in Spanish for 14 participants with a second session in English for 18. The underlying principles of CTAP during the first year was to identify structural mechanisms, including information on job opportunities, platforms for discussions, and venues for community support. These information co-ops allowed mutually beneficial information exchanges that have been maintained over time between the University and the community. That is, in addition to information shared with families on the mechanics of accessing higher education, families’ insights broadened project facilitators’ understandings of families and the knowledge they bring to education-related discussion. Family participants made known their insights, assets, and roles when navigating educational systems and accessing pathways to higher education.

During the second year, 2006–2007, workshop graduates worked within their home communities, where they shared and gathered information from their constituents through family forums. The workshops and subsequent family forum of CTAP bridged structured workshop formats to a grassroots focus on family knowledge and goal setting. For example, events included school tours where parents shared their knowledge of the school experience for their children with others. These insights were particularly useful for immigrant families who had many questions regarding the safety of U.S. schools. The formalized formats of these workshops provided opportunities for CTAP participants to be involved in what Schor and Gorski (1995) describe as shared education services and cultural experiences where community members served as ambassadors and experts within their communities.

During year 2, CTAP formalized access points to higher education in ways that extended the more typical dissemination of information on bureaucratic paper work and the necessary technicalities for completing applications and related forms. While the technical/procedural dimensions of access to higher education are critical, CTAP workshops also identified structures and institutional mechanisms that are self-sustaining. Specific outcomes included providing family partners with long-term, viable roles within school communities as advocates, liaisons, and educators.

During the third year, parents shared their insights about public education across multiple venues (e.g., community events and in their roles as school-based liaisons to other parents). They voiced their concerns about school-related issues

and learned avenues for problem solving and information sharing as advocates within their family and neighborhood communities. CTAP formalized systematic linkages between higher education and public schools in addition to identifying and sharing general information on pathways to higher education for traditionally underrepresented groups. Our third year discussion provided in-depth details on the evolution from information sharing to information creation. That is, as parents became more involved as participants, they adopted roles where their insights and knowledge from years 1 and 2 influenced their views of themselves as participants in schools and education-related experiences. A discussion of focal participants and their experiences later in this paper illustrates the perspectives and roles of parent participants over time.

Year 3 reflected the process of what Brown (2007) described as a commitment to communication and respect where multiple iterations of program development and implementation are informed by the knowledge and expertise of the local setting. In keeping with the mutually reciprocal goals of CBR, CTAP progressed beyond the technical elements of project implementation (e.g., where to meet, how much food to order) to collaboration where stakeholders became active participants in project development, (e.g., meeting with other members of the community, long-term goal setting, and community guided participation). Year 3 also included information sharing platforms from which parent advocates contributed their knowledge and expertise within the wider educational community. Changes from year 3 to the present illustrates developments in the degree to which community members are owners in the process of goal setting, project execution, and project evaluation as part of the planning for next steps.

### Methods and Data Analysis

During CTAP's first two years, data were collected from parents and workshop facilitators through surveys, meeting narratives, interviews, and a focus group. The first data set included surveys where 13 parents evaluated the quality of the workshops, provided suggestions for future sessions, and identified plans for incorporating workshop information into participants' daily lives and communities. Additional data were gathered during year 2 through three parent interviews and a focus group with workshop facilitators.

To analyze the qualitative data, the research team examined focus group transcripts, meeting

transcripts, and interviews. Independently, team members read interview transcripts, survey data, and a focus group summary. Through a process of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), a matrix was constructed to facilitate data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Initial categories for coding identified dominant themes using a form of triangulation (Denzin, 1989).

The stories of three parent advocates (pseudonyms) appear as short case studies (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1994) and showcase their perceptions of CTAP. Bonita, a Mexican immigrant and mother of four, runs an in-home day care. Gloria, a Caucasian mother of four, attends an applied technology program, and Rosa, a mother of four is a Mexican immigrant without a college education but wants her children to go to college. Case study participants were selected due to their willingness to: 1) participate in CTAP workshops; 2) complete interviews; and 3) serve as family forum advocates during monthly 2006–2007 meetings where they shared their expertise with others.

### Findings

#### *Workshop formats and recruiting*

In year 1, the CTAP workshop series was designed to build community dialogue about education access where all members' knowledge and contributions were valued. Workshops covered such topics as community schools, advocacy for children, building relationships between families and schools, accessing school services, healthy habits, and information on resources for children receiving special education services. Additional sessions were geared toward the developmental needs of children from birth through adulthood and general information on higher education. These information sharing sessions provided members of the community with workshops that highlighted parental rights within school communities and offered information to share with others—indicating a larger ripple effect.

The first workshop format included a two-day training session for Spanish speakers delivered by members of the Salt Lake City School District, the Salt Lake community, and The University of Utah. Funds through a HUD grant and a 21st Century Learning Grant provided participants with transportation to the two fall sessions, child care, meals, and stipends for participation. The spring training was specifically geared toward English speakers and included the same services.

Under the guidance of a community advocate

working collaboratively with the program director, participants from the community were recruited as members of an informal extant group who met regularly to discuss issues related to education and services for families and communities. The fall 2005 training, delivered in Spanish, served 14 participants with the spring session serving 18 community members.

### *Participant Feedback*

During the spring 2006 workshops, 18 participants took part in two half-day workshops delivered in English. The spring workshop content mirrored the fall presentation. Participants shared extremely positive feedback including their reactions to sessions that focused on how to interact with their children, suggestions for effectively communicating with their children, and ideas on how to engage in activities other than watching television. Participants commented positively on the workshop presentations on strategies for communication with teachers and ideas on how to become more involved in their children's schools.

Workshop presentations on strategies for self-care and self-improvement practices within their own education or career goals were also highlighted positively. Participants also cited their newfound knowledge regarding their rights as parents in U.S. schools as particularly useful. Parents cited the benefits of learning ways to communicate with their children about school, strategies for academic success, tools for communication with teachers, suggestions for greater involvement in schools, and plans for meeting long-term career goals.

### *Facilitators' Perspectives*

Focus group facilitators cited the value of providing families with opportunities to share their knowledge on how to promote their children's school success. Echoing a parent's feedback on navigating educational systems (including college) a facilitator reported:

If families don't know anyone who has ever been to college, then the families may need connections with those individuals who have the ability to make additional contacts. These workshops provide these levels of direct instruction and information sharing.

Facilitators suggested future workshop topics on the social, behavioral, and developmental needs of adolescents, and educational pathways

within American schools.

During year 2, efforts were taken to examine the perspectives of parents who had taken part in the orientation workshops. In-depth interviews were conducted with three workshop participants by a project evaluator. Translations were provided by a CTAP project director for Spanish speaking participants. The participants were contacted initially by project director Wanda Alison, who arranged for home visits. Project evaluator Becky Barlow and community liaison Paula Walker completed home visits with Bonita, Gloria, and Rosa.

### *Focal Parents*

Bonita, Rosa, and Gloria were three parents who participated in the CTAP workshop series. Their stories are shared as focal participants because they help illuminate the meaning of our findings.

#### *Bonita*

Bonita is in her mid-30s and is married with four children. Bonita and her family are immigrants from Mexico, and reported limitations in her English skills. Bonita runs a day-care from her home that she and her husband own. Her two oldest daughters are students at a curriculum and assessment lab in the Salt Lake City School District. Her younger daughter has been diagnosed with learning disabilities and the family sought the help of CTAP to identify the educational services necessary for her daughter. Bonita does not have a college education.

Alison and Barlow conducted the initial interview. Alison had a long-standing relationship with Bonita through related community work and brokered the interview as a conduit for Barlow and Bonita.

Bonita took a break from her in-home childcare to talk with Alison and Barlow. Barlow described Bonita's home as a large, nicely furnished home on the west side of Salt Lake City. The visit took place in Bonita's living room, while the kids watched television in the family room. Bonita was glad to see Alison and spoke with her at length in Spanish with questions and concerns regarding the needs of her younger daughter, who was recently diagnosed with learning disabilities. Barlow reported, "It was obvious that Bonita trusted Alison and sought her help as an advocate for her."

The interview was conducted in Spanish. Alison translated the interview questions into Spanish, and listened to Bonita answer in Spanish. Alison then translated Bonita's answers to Barlow,

who took notes and recorded the interview.

#### *Gloria Jones*

Gloria is a Caucasian woman in her mid-30s. She is married and has four children. She does not have a college education, but has begun attending an applied technology institute in her community as a result of information gained through CTAP workshops. Upon their arrival for the interview, Gloria and her young son greeted Barlow and Walker for the interview. Gloria's home, described by Barlow as a small but comfortable home, was the location for the interview. Throughout the conversation Gloria was friendly and confident. Gloria's familiarity with Walker and CTAP was obvious as the two exchanged general updates on family and community topics. The interview began quickly and Gloria provided answers that were short and concise.

Gloria expressed concerns about some issues at her children's neighborhood elementary school and later transferred them to a charter school in a district 20 miles north of Salt Lake City. Gloria worked closely with staff to learn more about her rights as a parent and attended additional CTAP meetings to gain as much information as possible about educational options for her children. Since her first year in CTAP Gloria has secured a job in the Salt Lake School District.

#### *Rosa Morales*

Rosa is in her mid-30s and is relatively fluent in her conversational English. She is married and has four children, ages four through seventeen. She and her family are immigrants from Mexico. Rosa is a stay-at-home mom and she and her husband own their home. Rosa does not have a college education, but spoke highly of the value of education and reported that it is very important for her children to go to college.

Upon their arrival, Rosa welcomed Walker and Barlow to her large home, complete with a trampoline in the front yard. Rosa knew Walker well and was comfortable with her presence and questions. Rosa's 3-year-old daughter stayed close to her mom, with her older children in other parts of the house during the interview. The interview took place in the family living room, with a big-screen TV on a Spanish language station. As Barlow described the purpose of the visit and presented the consent forms and description of our project, Rosa became nervous and was hesitant about doing the interview. Barlow showed Rosa the interview questions. Rosa called her oldest son, who was 17, to translate for her. She decided she felt confident

in doing the interview, which began somewhat slowly. As she began talking, Rosa became more comfortable, and talkative. The interview lasted approximately 25 minutes.

#### *Parents' Perspectives*

Interview data from workshop participants reflect powerfully the impact of their experiences. Bonita commented:

Before I participated in the project I dropped off the girls at the curb in the car. Now I walk the girls into the school, pick up each of them in their class, and say "Hi" to their teachers. Before, I was afraid to talk to teachers. Now I ask the teacher for a book so we can go home and read it together.

Bonita noted that during past summers she would take her girls home to visit family. She told her husband that now she wants to remain home [Salt Lake] for part of the summer to enroll the girls in activities and classes. She noted, "Now that I'm aware of this information and the opportunity, I feel compelled to do it [summer school activities] even more."

When asked if participation in the workshop series helped parents become more involved in their child's school as advocates, Gloria commented:

Oh, definitely; it empowered me to know that if I was not happy with something going on, there were options that I had and could make changes. I took my children out of school and put them at a different school because I knew it was something that I could do... . It opened my eyes to what was actually going on in the school, the things that I had felt were going on were not OK and that I was not crazy—that you know, this is not right but because nothing's being done in the school—that doesn't mean they were right.

Gloria's comments reflect a level of validation in her knowledge about what needs to be in place for her children's education and her role in providing those insights.

For Rosa, participation in the workshop series provided a specific, detailed focus for discussions with her son on information about attending higher education. Rosa commented when asked about whether and how the workshops impacted

involvement in her children's education:

Yeah, a lot. More communication with my kids. And they like it, and I like it. I have four children—the program teaches me more and helps me a lot. And now when they complain about school, I relate. Before they didn't tell me stuff, now more and more I talk to them about everything, about everything. I can be open like that with my son and I like it a lot. The university program helped a lot, like I can do it too, my son, like you. It's not that we didn't cover things before, but now he can come and talk to me about something too. I like that better... Before I was scared talking about school and the way my son would do it or say it, and now I'm not scared about anything. I like that better. It's great.

While Bonita reported that the workshop series did not have a direct benefit for her, the impact on her family was significant. She reported that attendance at the workshop opened her eyes to what's around her as a parent and her contributions to the educational process for her children. She said that she wants more information; she wants to look into information that will help her children.

As a result of her CTAP experiences she is more attentive to her children's education now. And as a parent, she needs to educate herself and knows the power of her role in impacting her children's education through her communication with the school. Bonita reported that her training needs to be ongoing and she is looking for more education for herself.

For Rosa, the workshops provided a vehicle for discussion about her son's future. She noted:

I've always asked my kids what are they going to be doing later; they're going to be living and working at what, working at McDonald's? "If you want to do something good," I said [to my son], "you better go back to school and do something that will help you, so you need to be doing something to help with your work." And he said OK. From now on, I'm going to be talking about that a lot. I talk to him about what he needs to be thinking about...what he does and what he wants to do. I have said to him, "You need to know what you want because that

is good for you."

When asked if there were specific topics that would be helpful for families, Rosa commented:

I want my kids to go to college if they can...more [information] about how to get through high school and get into college. ...A lot of Mexican families don't know how to get that information. A lot of boys are already working...so I think it's good to have someone from the university or something to talk about going to college—something for you, something of value, something for people to be more intelligent about school. Now I see more Mexicans...coming here and lots with teenagers. They move here because it's [supposed] to be better, but sometimes it's the same. ... I understand a lot of people going through school and they need to see that I can do it and my family will get me the money ... see people talking about going to school. Like you go to high school and you see kids talking about going to college and my family has no money, but I do it. And kids can go home and tell their families so their families know about that.

For the focal participants in this study, CTAP provided the technical pathways for experiences that opened doors to discussions in education that they had not formally considered in the past. It's important to note the word "formal." These parents have always valued education. They've always considered the importance of education and employment options for their children. The workshop and continued dialogue about education-related issues provided the how-to platforms for families and opened their eyes to issues related to American public schools in the Salt Lake City School District. The forum of the workshop legitimized the goals of parents for their children and gave a level of specificity that allowed for continued discussion with their children, other parents, and school personnel (e.g., teachers and administrators). The technical information shared in the workshops provided a springboard for more in-depth discussions on education-related issues. Bonita noted that her experiences were validated by "opening my eyes to what's around as a parent." She said that she wants more information. She wants to look into information that will help her

children. She is more attentive to her children's education and knows she must also "educate myself."

In the two years following her initial work with CTAP, Bonita has been employed by The University of Utah as a CTAP parent-partnership liaison, where she spends part of her time at target schools linking parents to university-school information programs focused on navigating school systems and initial access to higher education. Recently, she played an instrumental role in connecting parents from two local high schools and a junior high, including information events held at the University where Bonita served as a family liaison connecting Spanish speaking parents as event participants.

Rosa no longer serves a role in CTAP; however, she volunteers in one of her children's classrooms as a teacher's aide. Her school is recognized as a CTAP site with 12 other actively engaged parents. In her role, Rosa facilitated a parent group and now leads Spanish speaking parents who connect with the wider family community through several school-based events. These parents attended university information events on access to higher education and lead the process for applying for college and financial aid within the community.

## Lessons Learned

### *Workshop Formats*

While data from our pilot group are promising and speak to the evolving status of collaborative efforts, initial findings are not without limitations. Parents suggested a friendlier workshop format including taking away physical barriers, such as tables, to encourage a format where participants talk about issues and needs. Parents were open and willing to learn; however, they reported facilitators need to be aware of individual differences between families based on issues such as immigration and documentation status. For the undocumented parents, discussions often related to their own status, in addition to their children's needs. Facilitators suggested counselors or advisors who could provide more explicit information with time to discuss issues regarding the work and education needs of many immigrant families.

When asked to evaluate the utility of various workshops, a facilitator reported, "Parents loved the meeting at our middle school... They were in awe." Prior to the school visit, parents were intimidated by the building and were pleased to learn that the glass in the building was shatter proof. Parents of elementary students reported that

the middle school tour defined next steps for their children. A discussion on the school's middle school teaming approach gave parents a feeling of support and helped them understand campus resources and safety. A workshop facilitator referenced the significance of formalized opportunities for parents to share knowledge on educational issues as active participants from across communities.

### *Workshop Impact*

The impact of CTAP is critical for the larger university-community project facilitators. When Gloria was asked if her experiences would have any impact beyond her participation in the workshops, because she now works in the Salt Lake School District, she said:

I tell everybody about it... I think it's really good. The more people that take it [the workshop], the better our schools will be. It's not a cultural thing, it's not a lazy thing, it's just a parent things. Where sometimes in the schools you've got to do what you can do—there's not much more you can do beyond that. Even though you work during the day, you work during the night, there are still things you can do. Let the parents not feel guilty about being the supermom that's in the class. I think it's great—I think everybody should take it.

For Gloria, CTAP participation provided both information on education-related issues and served as a mechanism for communication within her community where her contributions were valued.

### **Next Steps**

A feature of truly collaborative efforts that link universities and communities is through partnerships that recognize the role of multiple stakeholders. CBR, through CTAP, is designed to provide mutual benefits to stakeholders, flexible collaboration, and communication that is responsive to communities (Brown, 2007).

Definitions of mutual benefit may vary and are clearly open to interpretation. It is hoped that exposure to information is adequate in providing substantive opportunities for participants in various projects. While ideally useful, exposure to information on its own may not prove significant if the information and opportunities shared do not result in sustainable and institutionalized outcomes for participants. The outcomes of the CTAP training for Bonita, Gloria, and Rosa moved



beyond the valuable, though sometimes limited, exposure to information sharing. Clearly there are merits to “learning the ropes” of any organization; schools and educational institutions are no different. However, beyond sometimes narrow emphases on the how-tos of educational systems, learning about schools must also capitalize on how those systems provide, inform, and educate.

Work completed during years 1 and 2 established the groundwork for reciprocal collaboration. Specifically, as a result of the reciprocal partnership between The University of Utah and the Salt Lake School District and the community-based workshops, Gloria and Rosa are currently employed as family advocates within an elementary and middle school. In their positions, both women provide other parents with specific information about the school site and are instrumental in their efforts to link school, home, and community. In Rosa’s position with the Salt Lake School District, she conducts much of her school-family liaison work from her home, calling other parents to let them know about school community council meetings, parent-teacher conferences, and other school functions. As a result of the training, Rosa fields specific questions from community members about the purpose of school-related topics such as meetings, district policies, and procedures, defining who should attend various meetings, and identifying why it is important to be an active participant in their children’s education. Gloria’s position has similar job dimensions but she is active on-site and at a local community center, where many families participate in pre-school and after-school activities. Gloria’s employed position gives her the ability to introduce parents to a host of community resources and supports.

Clearly, the newfound roles of our focal participants reflect their varied and developing influence within their communities. Since its inception, CTAP has more closely aligned with CBR to reflect community driven action where reciprocal learning and teaching take place by and for community members.

### **Year 3**

Early parent involvement in the development of the CTAP workshops opened dialogue between families and the school community. Years 1 and 2 workshops provided opportunities for stakeholders to examine the tools necessary for navigating public education. Year 3, and the beginning of year 4, more closely reflect the tenets of CBR

where community ownership and project direction are in place through site-based models, where stakeholders inform the direction of projects as members. CTAP’s site-based model is currently active at six schools: two elementary, two middle, and two high school locations. While each partnership site reflects the unique strengths and needs of that community, CTAP is consistently utilized as a mechanism for parent voices where their experiences influence education positively.

CTAP’s site-based models facilitate venues that bring together parents and families to engage in issues that affect youth, while simultaneously promoting a more equitable and reciprocal exchange of knowledge and information. For example, a dual immersion language project at Alan Elementary School had a long-standing history of divisions between the Latina/o and Caucasian parent communities. Since a CTAP presence was established, a new dialogue among parents emerged for all parents, with a conscious recognition of ethnicity and race. Through the CTAP forum, common goal-setting for educational access and success developed. The conversations between parents and university partners provided opportunities to discuss the process for creating a college-bound culture for children beginning in kindergarten. The parent community identified shared values and used formalized dialogues to reach across their historical divisions. Initial CTAP contacts at Alan were bridged by Rosa Morales. Currently, an additional 12 parents are involved in formal roles at the school site and through CTAP.

### **The Role of University Research**

The move to site-based CTAP partnerships has enriched community-generated research opportunities for University of Utah faculty. These CBR partnerships support not only parents but youth, particularly at the high school level. Specifically, expanded community involvement in CTAP was most evident at CTAP high school sites that included both youth and adults. In coordination with parents and University faculty, a youth core conducted interviews and focus groups to identify issues deemed important to young people within the school context. Project data themes reflected discrimination faced by youth at their school sites and were showcased in youth generated videos shared with CTAP stakeholders including parents, teachers, school administrators, and university partners. A formal showcase of the youth-initiated investigations allowed youth and parents to share discussions on how to address

issues in their community.

A significant outcome of the family community linkages is the Partners in the Park Partnership (PIP). The PIP program began in 2003 as an opportunity to create spaces for families to gain a greater awareness and related pursuits in accessing higher education. PIP provided unique spaces where families, youth, and partners, are exposed to higher education as a viable option for the future. Funds from a community partner provided 10 CTAP parents with paid support to act as family-community liaisons at PIP events. They shared their insights on the concept of collaborative partnerships as mechanisms for making higher education a reality.

### **CTAP's Future**

Each year the CTAP community grows, benefiting from the synergy of additional partners and program graduates. Four CTAP graduates are positioned in formal school-community advocate roles within the Salt Lake School District and act as community-based parent liaisons, responsible for maintaining communication networks with parents in their neighborhoods. By attending school meetings, notifying families of school events, and encouraging other parents to become involved in school activities, advocates integrated broader parent participation and diverse perspectives into the school environment.

As CTAP has grown and produced positive results as indicated through data gathered from participants and project facilitators, CTAP-affiliated activities have gained considerable interest from the local school district. That is, area principals and teachers are requesting more specialized workshops targeted to the needs of each school level and community. Similarly, parents of middle school students are requesting more specific information on issues related to adolescent development and youth culture.

The development of programs that expand into the community allow a greater number of stakeholders to come together to exchange knowledge, creating a broader scope of understanding for all partners. The expansion of CTAP also facilitates a greater number of faculty members from the University of Utah who bring research into practice in ways that assist schools and families and inform their work on community/university partnerships.

As site-based CTAP partnerships emerge, partners reflect the specific issues and strengths of each school community and the neighborhoods

where they reside. According to the January 2008 issue of the *CTAP Newsletter*, recent site-based models hope to bring together all stakeholders in ways that will engage the specific issues affecting their home communities.

### **Significance**

Increasingly diverse communities that reach across traditional boundaries are on the rise in major urban communities in the United States (Kane & Orsini, 2005; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In response, Pre-K-16 stakeholders must forge partnerships and develop programs that value and reflect these changes.

After four consecutive years of collaboration by a university, a school district, and community, CTAP has become a campus-community partnership that connects families, schools, and resources to validate family support of children's educational success. A core group of CTAP parent advocates have accepted leadership roles where they continue to connect the needs of families in their neighborhoods to the wider educational community.

Overall, parent participants positively evaluated methods that build communication between children and teachers and strategies for self-care and parental rights. Early data indicate the ripple effect of information sharing between parents who teach workshop content with others (e.g., parents, neighbors, and family members).

CTAP was initially designed as a mechanism for sharing information on education-related issues including suggestions for navigating Pre-K-12 settings and accessing higher education. The workshop series also prepared parents to be conduits on education-related issues within their communities. In addition to general information sharing, all stakeholders learned of families' needs with specific emphases on immigration, documentation, and venues for greater voice and community empowerment.

CTAP presents a unique opportunity for establishing reciprocal relationships between parents and others committed to equitable Pre-K-16 education. Our study identified a framework for sharing experiences across stakeholders with a critical community-driven focus for continued dialogue. In year 2 our project extended collaborative opportunities to include monthly family forums delivered by CTAP participants and a bilingual workshop series. Efforts during year 3 and the beginning of year 4 included paid opportunities for CTAP parents to share their knowledge with members of the wider

educational community. Further analysis will examine the effects of these project components.

Opportunities that unite stakeholders have the potential to serve as catalysts for family-community connectedness, where the well-being of all members is enhanced (Kemmis, 1995). Projects such as CTAP expand our definitions of teachers, redefine the lines of expertise, and build educational pathways in new ways.

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