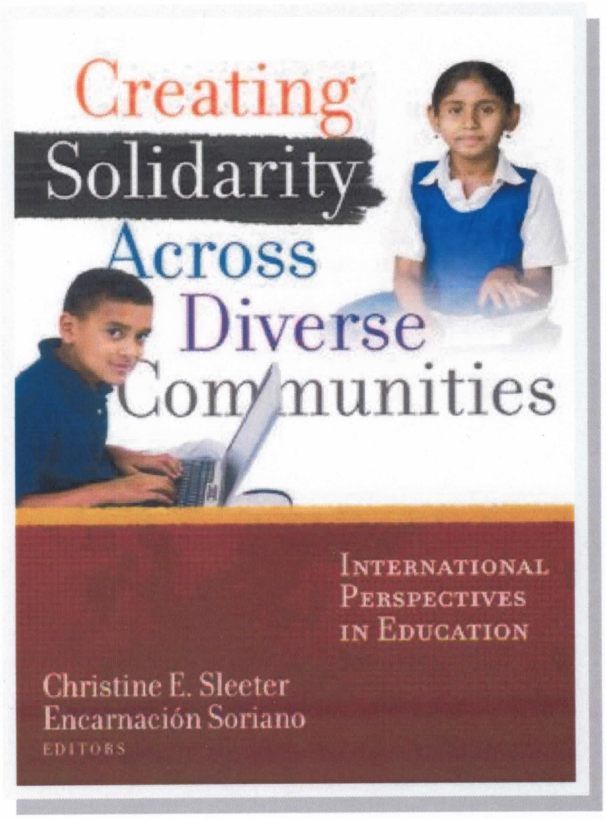
"Whether educators are working with student populations perceived as diverse or homogeneous, *Creating Solidarity Across Diverse Communities* provides profound insights into strategies for building consensus, efficacy, and reducing prejudice and conflict. This is a well-researched volume on complex theories and diverse practices for building solidarity to effect educational change."
—**Merry M. Merryfield**, School of Teaching and Learning, The Ohio State University



In this important book, experts from around the globe come together to examine what solidarity in multicultural societies might mean and how it might be built. With a variety of analytical perspectives and findings, the authors present original research conducted in the United States, New Zealand, Spain, France, Chile, Mexico, and India. Educators will recognize relationships between issues discussed in the book and their own places of work, helping them to better understand issues of diversity and take steps toward building solidarity in their own schools and communities. This book demonstrates the commonality of purpose across the globe to connect schools and teachers with the communities they serve, and suggests avenues for bringing diverse understandings together to bridge antagonism and fear.

8

Build Me a Bridge

Steps to Solidarity Between a School and Its Community

Gilberto Arriaza & Alice Wagner

"Be careful! I can't believe you park on the other side of the tunnel!" Rosie said to me, almost shouting from one end of the school's parking lot. Rosie's words stay with me as I walk down the stairs to the tunnel's opening. As I descend, my ears and eyes adjust to the darkness and the laughter of the women walking together through the lingering smoke of the underage high school smokers. The women help each other to carry strollers down the stairs, their animated conversation brightening the damp interior. As I pass them, they offer cheerful greetings: "¡Maestra! ¡Buenas tardes! ¿Cómo está? (Teacher! Good afternoon! How are you?)" A train rumbles overhead and deafens my ears as the rest of the conversation and laughter continues into the darkness. I begin to ascend and the faint odor of urine fades and mingles with the scents of springtime.

Tall fences separate the houses from the path, but the generosity of nature pushes beyond these man-made borders. An apricot tree decorates this well-used walkway with blossoms that cover the path, hiding random bits of trash that are the usual adornment. Nearby, an urban rooster crows, blending its song with the faint bark of a neighborhood dog. Perfumed teenagers check their cell phones as they slowly make their way home down the path from school. The houses, this side of the tunnel, have many signs of careful tending, yet some, with their dry brown front lawns and empty driveways, show the telltale signs of foreclosure, silent testimony to the economic crisis.

One of us (Alice) jotted the impressions above in her journal. In this chapter, we discuss our qualitative study of a California school's efforts to lay the foundation of solidarity with its parental community. We first briefly discuss

the shifting demographics as they relate to the site's social tensions. Next, we discuss what we mean by solidarity and define key concepts, which constitute the core of the theory we used in this chapter. We then examine what constitutes a challenge to teachers' comfort zone, and close the chapter with a discussion and conclusions. We argue that social distance, particularly between teachers and parents, presents a challenge to building solidarity. Without direct attention to factors that underlie social distance—particularly race and social class—progress toward solidarity will remain elusive.

THE PLACE

As the vignette above describes, Golden Prairie Elementary School (pseudonym) is located in what appears a tightly knit working-class community in the south side of Hayward, California, a city known over 100 years ago as "Hungry Town," as Helen Winker, an 80-year-old lifelong South Hayward resident, described it to us (all names of persons in this chapter are pseudonyms). This observation has remained true through the years, even as Hayward strives to become more economically stable and pushes toward more economic vigor. Although some teachers choose to live in Hayward, many others seek more prosperous locales in surrounding cities in which to live and raise their children, some traveling over 30 minutes each morning to teach.

The west side of the train tracks hosts single-family homes that, in fact, house at times more than one family. Golden Prairie is a school with a good reputation among parents. To ensure access, some families find it worth a tight squeeze to share a home with another family, and a white lie to attempt to outwit the school's strictly defined attendance areas.

The other alternative for gaining access to Golden Prairie is to seek housing closer to the school, on the east side of the train tracks, where apartments are more plentiful and houses more affordable. Tall, brown buildings face the well-used cars parked along the straight but broken sidewalks. Walking under fruit trees and past unkempt large yards that surround a trio of small houses, a visitor might hear the band practice of a local group playing Mexicano music. To the right, rows of houses lead down to the train station. These blocks run parallel to the road that houses businesses and restaurants in various stages of economic depression. Beauty is present in the flowers of fruit trees, the architecture of the grandiose Catholic church and its recently rebuilt high school behind the trees and the rolling golden hills that grace the length of Mission Boulevard and beyond.

Golden Prairie's parking lot marks the beginning of the neighborhood park that provides a margin of green grass between the train tracks and the houses that face the street. A walk down the curving path through the well-trimmed grass leads one past the basketball court, through the playground,

and past the used syringes tossed into the bushes by illicit drug users. The graffiti tells a story that many members of the community can read. To outsiders, the same paint tells a story of young people searching for meaning beyond the distress they feel with the life they have. Children climb on the play structure with their parents close by as dogs and their owners play and run. Shuddering trains rush by, startling unaccustomed visitors, while habituated locals seem unaware of their passing.

Golden Prairie offers a bilingual education program (as do many schools in the school district) to serve the large population of English Language Learners. Parents may choose between bilingual education in which students study academic subjects in Spanish as they gradually learn English, or Structured English Immersion (SEI) taught wholly in English.

The school reflects the shifting demographics of the United States, and the particular case of California, where more and more there exists a reversed proportional racial representation between teachers and students. In 2007, the school counted 29 teachers: 4 Latina/o, 1 Black, and 24 White. About seven out of every ten students are Latino (mostly children of Mexican immigrant families). More than half of the students are English Language Learners, and most of them speak Spanish. Besides English and Spanish, more than 15 languages are spoken by smaller numbers of English Language Learners, including Tagalog, Hindi, Vietnamese, Tongan, and Urdu.

In a school where teachers commute in to work, everyday solidarity between them and the local community always seems to be difficult to achieve without conscious effort. Close social interaction with parents, whether through formal venues or informal ones (e.g., visiting parents' homes), happens infrequently. Teachers drive through the school's neighborhood en route to and from school, but rarely do they venture on foot through the tunnel or along the sidewalks. The school's leadership has sought to connect—as the tunnel does in actual physical terms—teachers with parents as a central strategy to close the social distance between them in order, ultimately, to improve children's academic performance.

HOW POPULATION SHIFTS CHANGED THE SCHOOL

Parental involvement in children's schooling is rooted in the ideal of public education as a system linked to a pluralistic, local, and secular democracy. The benefits of parents' involvement in schools are so clear and well documented that discouraging parent participation seems to work against a school's function and purpose (see, for instance, the studies by Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998; Collier, 1995; Decker & Decker, 2003; Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). For years, it has been argued in the United States

that students, teachers, and parents constitute the three essential pillars of this system. Yet, somehow, including parents as active school supporters seems to be a source of unproductive tension in the school system as a whole at Golden Prairie.

We can list a long combination of factors as potential explanations for why this school–parent fragmentation still occurs. Instead, we posit that current demographic shifts due in part to the late-20th-century immigration phenomenon (see, for instance, Bouvier, 1991; Cornelius & Martin, 1993; Edmonston & Passel, 1994; LeMay, 1989; Rodriguez, 1996) have profoundly changed the social, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic landscape of today's student population, especially in the state of California, while teachers, pedagogy, delivery, and content continue to reflect a society dating a few decades back, when assimilation constituted the predominant pedagogical approach: "sink or swim."

While public schools, such as in California, have increasingly mutated into systems serving predominantly low socioeconomic families, and of Latino, Southeast Asian, and African American heritage, the predominant racial and socioeconomic profile of the teaching force reflects a bygone social order: White and middle-class. According to Knowledge Networks (2010), about three out of every four teachers in the United States are female and eight out of every ten are White. In California, more specifically, White teachers comprise about 72.1% of the total, 14.5% are Latina/o, and 4.5% are Black (EdSource, 2009), rates that may not vary significantly in the near future.

These demographics lead us to wonder about the impact of the current cultural mismatch on the educational system as a whole, and what the social ramifications might be of the cultural disparities between teachers and students. What is clear to us is that at Golden Prairie there appears to be a challenging social distance between teachers and parents.

SOLIDARITY AND SOCIAL DISTANCE IN THE SCHOOL

Solidarity signifies the purposeful actions seeking to eliminate social distance and to redress the tensions it generates. Solidarity can be sustained when and if explicit treatment of race, social class, and gender roles takes center stage. Given that social distance forms the core of our definition of solidarity, we will briefly discuss it.

One of the earliest definitions of social distance comes from Park (1924), who defined it in terms of understanding and intimacy among individuals and groups as measured by grades and degrees. Coleman (1988), Putnam (2000), and Forrest and Kearns (2001), among others, treat social distance as an element associated with social capital. Putman's (2000) study of civic life among U.S. communities shows that generalized

reciprocity lies at the base of social capital. Putnam notes that generalized reciprocity exists when people do things for each other "without expecting anything immediately in return, and perhaps without knowing" the other person (p. 134). Putnam observes that a substantial amount of trust and honesty anchors this social behavior.

In social capital terms, when generalized reciprocity exists in a community, the cost of social transactions goes down, and accordingly, social benefits increase. Neighbors watch out for each other's self-interests (e.g., homes, cars parked on the street), and become protective agents—taking care of the neighborhood's children and reciprocating in exchanges of money, information, food, and even tools. As a result, the separation among individuals and groups diminishes. People relate to each other more as acquaintances than as strangers. Even in cases where heterogeneity marks the life of a community, social distance shrinks considerably anytime social capital is strong. Then solidarity, understood as "a feeling of membership or belonging to a group of interlocutors" (Ritchie, Tobin, Roth, & Carambo, 2007, p. 154), can occur.

In cases such as ours, where teachers and the school's parental community live in separate and spatially distant neighborhoods, it is safe to assume that social distance is considerably high, since these separate living arrangements do not allow teachers to attend local, ordinary social functions, or have any ongoing meaningful relationships with members of the community whose children they educate. Conversely, parents may consider teachers and the building where their children spend countless hours of their lives, foreign and removed from their own day-to-day activities. Thus, building solidarity in these circumstances becomes increasingly more important because understandings cultivated in isolation tend not only to be wrong but to nurture false assumptions.

Teacher perceptions and preconceived notions of the families and their neighborhoods often end up primarily shaped by their firsthand contact with children and youths, and to a lesser extent by the occasional meeting with parents (Manning, 1995). Not having other sources to confirm or deny perceptions, the potential for teachers' confusion may considerably increase, because such limited contact may only confirm assumed understandings.

For instance, in her ethnographic study of ten Mexican families living in the United States near the border with Mexico, Valdés (1996) shows how, when social distance exists, key communication breakdown between these families and the schools might take place. The author shows some of the cultural and social ramifications that occur when teachers use assimilation as the frame when approaching these families—teachers dismiss and marginalize the families' cultural specificity, from traditional gender roles, to age, to the functions of education in their lives.

Sending messages home illustrates such communication breakdown. When teachers send evaluative or other types of information through the children, either as written text or orally, the information may be ignored by the family, since legitimate communication with an authority figure (such as a teacher) in that Mexican-origin community only happens face-to-face.

Schools have used a variety of approaches—e.g., home visits, clubs, centers—to shorten the social gap. Since home visits played a central role in Golden Prairie's efforts to build solidarity, we briefly describe what is known about them. Structured and mandated home visits have been used as a remedy to social distance for many years (Harry, Klingner, & Hart, 2005). Visiting families is a way to build solidarity when participants understand that the purpose of these visits is to work with families to build relationships and exchange information (Goodson, Layzer, & St. Pierre, 2000). During home visits, teachers may inevitably expose themselves to their own cultural misconceptions and the social distance between themselves and their students. The most successful visit are those for which teachers prepare by engaging the role that race and social stratification play as mediating factors (Bell, 2002; Manning, 1995). Structured home visits may result in a heightened sense of empathy toward the "child and the child's situation" which, in turn, may influence the teacher's "attitude toward helping that child in the classroom" (Meyer & Mann, 2006, p. 95). Visits may also translate into teachers' increased cultural awareness, which eventually materializes as culturally relevant teaching (Ginsberg, 2007). Approaches that prepare parents and teachers alike for these visits seem to hold greater promise.

De Gaetano (2007) reports that after 3 consecutive years, a program educating parents and teachers about schooling and the community, respectively, the participating Latino families showed understanding of formal and informal active participation in the education of their children at home and the school site, as well as the demystification of the function of schools in their lives and the lives of their children. Likewise, teachers demonstrated an increased awareness about cultural and linguistic issues, which, in turn, aided them to prepare culturally responsive learning experiences for the students. It appears that when schools additionally offer services to the community (such as literacy, English as a second language, dental care, and child care), the potential for sustained involvement increases considerably (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Thus far, we have described the immigrant, low-socioeconomic neighborhood to clearly locate our study. We explained how the mismatch between the racial and social composition of the teaching force and the parental community constitute an influential factor in the existing social distance between them. We also defined the nature of solidarity and what is known about some of the actions schools have taken to build it. Now we need to take a closer look at the concrete experience of building solidarity at Golden Prairie elementary.

THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN TEACHERS AND PARENTS

As a new principal, Ms. Marie Rivas soon realized that the school staff and the parent community had, other than formal encounters, little or no ongoing relations. Ms. Rivas and a small group of core teacher leaders, agreed that organized home visits would help. She then secured a grant to pay teachers for the time they would put into this activity in pre-visit workshops, the actual home visits, and the post-visit debriefings. Visits were voluntary. Twenty-one members of the staff attended the initial preparation and home visit training. Only six teachers went on to do more than one visit. By year 2, only four participated.

We, the authors, documented the experience. Using two different instruments, we surveyed all 29 teachers. One survey focused on teachers who visited homes at least once. The other focused on those who did not participate. To make sure we would have a clear picture of what was going on, we also organized a focus group of seven teachers, and one-on-one informal as well as structured interviews with several teachers, parents, and the school principal. Additionally, we kept close participant-observer journals throughout.

The following journal entry encapsulates the mind-set Ms. Rivas inherited at the time of her arrival to the school:

> Instead of relaxing over a leisurely 30-minute lunch, teachers have packed the small, dark mailroom. I'm there with Jasmine and Amanda, picking up our mail. Jasmine is a bilingual teacher who learned Spanish as an adult. She reaches out to Amanda: "I meant to get those books you wanted this morning, but a parent came and wanted to talk with me. Then the bell rang and I didn't have time to run over to your room." Jasmine paused, and continued, "*I* love teaching!" she exclaimed. "I just can't stand dealing with parents!" The bell rang, drawing all of us outside to where the students were lined up in the warm sunshine. The teachers' chatting continued as they walked out together to direct their students into the classrooms from lunch.

When Ms. Rivas first came to Golden Prairie Elementary as the new principal, the relation between teachers and parents was very much limited to classroom sessions, or to official events such as the Back-to-School Night at the beginning of every school year. The previous principal had recognized the parents' need for a language bridge and hired teachers who spoke Spanish to reflect the language of the community, which was the extent of her efforts to build solidarity between the staff and parents.

Ms. Rivas launched a two pronged initiative consisting of 1) home visits, and 2) formal and informal direct parental involvement in the school's affairs. We define these activities as the steps to building solidarity between the school and its community. We identified three emerging themes throughout our experience at Golden Prairie elementary school: visits, unifying the community, and significance of leadership.

Visits

Jasmine's reaction—captured in the excerpt above—to talking with parents captures some of the class and race tensions we uncovered in our study. While all six teachers who participated in the home visits agreed that "apprehension was relieved" and that "relationships improved" between them and the families, about three out of every four who did not participate stated that their "level of knowledge of the community [was] sufficient." More than half of these same teachers argued that "lack of time is a significant factor in participating in home visits."

Asked about the incentives provided for faculty involvement in the home visits, one of the teacher leaders who participated in home visits said: "We would pay teachers to do something wonderful, that would improve their practice and make families happy." And then she added: "Working with easy families would be easy; we didn't have too many difficult ones."

In addition to being compensated for their time, those teachers who did participate only visited "easy families." Those families considered "easy" were immigrant families, the majority from rural Mexico. No other cultural groups were visited. Teachers were encouraged to begin with families they felt a connection with, where they would feel comfortable. In the end, few teachers pushed their comfort zone into new territory.

Over time, these structured visits left closer relationships between the participating teachers and the families they visited. Despite these attempts, home visits never become a habit, a way the school relates to its community, even among those six participating teachers.

Uniting the Parent Community

As part of Ms. Rivas's attempts to close the social distance between the community and the school, she established both formal and informal structures for both groups to congregate, meet each other, and talk. Between 2006 and 2010, formal leadership committees have been established with greater force and expanded responsibilities. These structures include the School Site Council (SSC), which is, among other things, charged with budget decisions; and the Parents and Teachers Association (PTA), which is charged with coordination of volunteerism and fundraising. These two bodies give

parents and teachers parity representation. In fact, the PTA election resembled a true community festive event. Parents and teachers together tallied the votes and a number of people came to watch the process. In the SSC, by establishing seven parents for seven teachers, both parents and teachers will be involved and will work together.

The legally mandated English Learner Advisory Committee (ELAC) has grown in size and influence over the years as well, focusing specifically on the needs and issues of children officially classified as English Learners. These policy-mandated structures are expected to operate on a regular basis, regardless of the school leadership. However, making sure they all function and influence the school depends on whether such leadership—by prioritizing and encouraging attendance, and soliciting parents' views—places them on equal footing with the regular school operations.

Following the school district's policy that requires each school to have a parent center, Golden Prairie has for years had a room equipped with tables, chairs, a microwave, and an electric coffee maker where parents congregate. They use this place to organize activities, stop for a chat, have a cup of coffee, or just sit as they wait for school to be dismissed. The activities are generally unsupervised by school personnel, and as long as what takes place there is not for personal lucrative ends, its uses are open.

Informal structures function parallel to the formal ones. Parents are invited to have *Café con la Directora* (Coffee with the Principal), which is a semiformal monthly meeting where the principal listens to their concerns and ideas, while educating them about their rights and obligations with the U.S. education system. This venue involves almost exclusively immigrant mothers from Mexico who find it convenient to participate. The meetings take place during regular school hours. Working parents, including many fathers, are usually at work during that time. The principal also sends a weekly phone message to all parents, letting them know what is happening at the site and encouraging their involvement. These calls go out to all parents in both Spanish and English.

These informal structures have spawned a few initiatives, including a writing workshop series in Spanish language attended by mothers who used autobiographical material as the basis for essay writing that culminated in a Saturday celebration where mothers read their writings to an audience of children and adults. Another initiative offered by the city police covered a variety of topics, including community safety tips and gang prevention, culminating in a "graduation" for all of the participants. Yet another initiative is the African American parents' club that resulted in the first annual Celebration of African American Culture Through Art and Music in 2010. Parent friendship groups have also emerged. One led to a local women's walk against cancer. Another group of women took a class sponsored by the local community college, which for many was their first foray into higher education.

Finally, parent-organized events of a more leisurely and celebratory nature—e.g., movie nights, carnivals, and dances—run throughout the school year. Parents often ask Ms. Rivas if teachers will attend, if they will bring their children. But their absence is palpable. Moreover, Maria Hurtado, a mother of three, illustrated to us how cultural difference has affected her, and arguably, most mothers like her. She referred to a "coldness" of the school culture:

> *No hay celebraciones. Una que otra. En México siempre hay algo que celebrar. Es tan diferente aquí comparado a México. Es frío aquí. Vine una vez a una celebración para Martin Luther King. ¡Me dormí! Era todo en inglés. Me aburrí. No volví a venir hasta que cambiaron unas cosas.* [No celebrations here. Just once in a while. In Mexico there is always something to celebrate. It's so different here in comparison to Mexico. It's cold here. I came once to a Martin Luther King celebration. I fell asleep! It was all in English. I was bored. I never came back until some things changed.]

Ms. Hurtado's comment echoes larger, unspoken feelings that suggest deeper cultural distancing. We wonder whether celebrations offered by teachers that encourage parental involvement and/or increased teacher participation in parents' events could bridge some of the social distance present at the site.

Teachers stated that lack of time was a significant factor in not participating. The surveys showed that they also felt comfortable in their knowledge of the community. These seemingly superficial reasons may belie deeper feelings, not so easily disclosed, as hinted at in the following account in the journal of one of the authors:

> Some of the difficulties for the staff in electing to not participate in home visits were fear of the unknown, a lack of time. For some, it seemed like "one more thing to do." They did not see the benefits of participating. Also, some had their own personal reasons for not participating. They didn't want to risk having an "uncomfortable moment."

Fear of the unknown—avoiding the risk of uncomfortable moments—codify avoidance, and possibly lack of will and skill in confronting the very issue that may be preventing teachers from building solidarity with a community that most definitely does not mirror them.

Variations of public commentary that refer to parents' "lack of formal education," "dysfunctional homes," or "difficulty talking to them"—as in "I love teaching, but can't stand parents"—as reasons not to establish ongoing solidarity is the manifestation of a behavior that seems, in spite of great efforts from the leadership, quite pervasive.

The Significance of Leadership

Ms. Rivas plays a central role in the school's efforts to build solidarity within the parental community. She mobilized resources to initiate the structured home visits, and created all the venues discussed thus far. "I feel I've been this bridge, always connecting," Ms. Rivas asserted when we asked how she saw herself working with parents. She then elaborated how parents spoke to teachers through her, and vice versa. This function, however, appeared to be consuming her energy and time. She expressed the need for parents to go directly to teachers and wanted the staff to embrace the idea that they needed a direct connection with the parents of the students they serve.

The encouragement to come together to the parent center or to have coffee with the principal has allowed parents to create solidarity among themselves. They talk about their children's schooling; they compare one classroom to another, comment about an issue, and share their experiences. When they encounter differential treatment, they go directly to Ms. Rivas. They actively seek her counsel and advocacy to mediate their relationships with teachers.

Reflecting on her experiences, Ms. Rivas considers her role as a mediator to solve problems, and as an explainer for perceived teachers' shortcomings. "Parents know teachers never attend events, afterschool programs," she stated in one of our interviews. "They [parents] complain to me about that." And then she concluded: "So far I've been a buffer for teachers. I've protected them by excusing them before parents."

MAKING SENSE OF THIS EXPERIENCE

Solidarity—understood here as closing social distance between teachers and parents, and within the different parents' subgroups—is in its very early stages at Golden Prairie. Increased solidarity is happening mostly within the parental community. As parents close the distance gap among themselves, by doing things such as planning events together, they create bonds among themselves, hence improving their social capital.

As the connecting tunnel is metaphorically extended into the school, parents create a stronger base from which to interface with teachers on more equal footing. The teachers who participated in home visits indicated that their relationships with families improved. The teachers' comments replicate what research on home visits has shown. But because so few teachers participated, structured home visits did not translate into the closing of social distance between the school as a whole and parents. Other school efforts, as we showed in the brief literature review in this chapter's first section, seem to have decreased social distance for and within parents' and teachers' groups.

The generally poor teacher participation in the school's efforts to build solidarity reveals deeper school culture issues. Offering "easy families" makes us wonder who are the "difficult families," and whether by providing such choice, unspoken racial and class prejudice was simply relegated to the margins, and treated as something else. Referring to "fear of the unknown" as a reason why so many teachers did not participate seems to avoid precisely that.

The most significant steps taken so far have been toward building solidarity within the parental community; they are interacting together and supporting each other. As parents are increasingly involved in more activities at the school, they inevitably become a larger block from which they can better engage teachers. However, despite the two-pronged efforts of the principal to build connections, teachers continue to be absent.

For a White woman to walk in neighborhoods populated by folks who are ethnically or racially different from her might be perceived as an odd sight to the inhabitants, and it might be anomalous for her, to say the least. But opting out of home visits could simply be too high of a price, for this act may trap teachers in their own assumptions and understandings about the neighborhood's social and cultural makeup. Then, social distance and cultural estrangement will continue to be high and will only increase in the foreseeable future.

In order to last, school-based initiatives must be sustained by actions originating from the community itself. So far, the school principal clearly occupies an indispensable role as the central convener of solidarity work. She brokers solidarity by conveying messages to and from each of the participants (teachers and parents). While this type of leadership may be necessary as an initial phase, it is clearly unsustainable. When asked about this, Ms. Rivas expressed her belief that formal structures will be able to take care of sustainability. Research has shown (e.g., DeShera Rodriguez, 2008; Donato, 1997) that the power of co-optation that institutions exert might overpower the will for transformation of individuals or groups.

CONCLUSIONS

Social distance has been slightly affected at Golden Prairie Elementary School. Solidarity created through the opening of formal and informal structures, which have allowed closeness among parents, seems to be the most significant solidarity work thus far. This kind of solidarity makes it possible for parents to exchange information, organize groups, and forge degrees of social capital. Indeed, social capital appears to have increased because parents have established connections among themselves, and have, so far, begun to stand together around common concerns on issues affecting the education of their children.

Latina/o parents, specifically mothers, seem to have reduced social distance among themselves, yet they still tend to cede their influence to the school principal, and appear to prefer to let her mediate their relations with teachers, so as not to disrupt the status quo. In contrast, the African American parent club was formed after just a year of evening parent meetings. This parent group took the initiative to transform itself from a principal-led group to an independent club, hosting its own events that brought together various community services and educational groups.

The work of the school principal has been crucially important in the creation of solidarity. Her work reminds us of the significance of the role that educational leaders can play as change agents. However, as long as this work primarily comes from the school site and from the principal's office, the sustainability of it all appears vulnerable at best. The imbalance of power between the community and teachers continues to be great. Teachers most definitely benefit from working within the power of the institution, while parents, especially Latina/o, to a degree depend on the principal's advocacy.

If the principal progressively removes herself from her function as convener and as power broker, then she may provide a first step toward building capacity for the long haul. Parallel to this, parents need to actively engage each other, and the schooling of their children. The more parents take the initiative, the more promising the school's efforts for the future.

Parental involvement has overwhelmingly included women—who, for the most part, are housewives—and very few men. Most activities have taken place during the day, the normal working hours for these families' men. By making spaces available that only housewives can use, the school might inadvertently be contributing to keep intact traditional patriarchal family relations.

Solidarity may depend, ultimately, on having open and unambiguous conversations on race and social class. Despite a plethora of published resources people in schools can potentially use, if misconceptions are not corrected, assumptions about economic poverty are not challenged, and racial prejudice is not debunked, sustainable progress toward solidarity will remain elusive. So far, these conversations have been tangential at Golden Prairie.

For sustainability purposes, the small group of teachers that has been more amenable to creating solidarity with the parental community could easily become the school leadership team. As a core group, they could start a process of moving the rest of the faculty in the direction of full solidarity among themselves and between them and the parental community. In the words of a teacher leader:

> Teaching is more than the classroom. It involves the community. Especially when the economy is broken. The culture of the teachers is changing. It is changing for sure.

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