



Engaging with the Community

Developing Networks of Responsibility
to Educate America's Youths

Institute for Educational Inquiry
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PREFACE

John I. Goodlad

Over the past few years, I have asked various diverse groups of educators, school board members, and others to tell me what first comes into their minds when I say each of a pair of words. I do not tell them in advance that the words are “schooling” and “school.” The differences in their responses are substantial. “Schooling” elicits replies such as bureaucratic, policy making, a business enterprise, authoritarian, rules and regulations. The tone softens in response to “school”: boys and girls, learning, home away from home, nice memories, a place where lifetime friendships are forged, etc.

A century ago, philosopher William James referred to the “hard and tough” and the “soft and tender” existing side by side in the fabric of American society. My little experiment suggests the presence of two contrasting subcultures in the culture of our system of public schooling.

The chasm between these two subcultures has widened considerably and rapidly over the past three to four decades. The conversation, policy making, and even prescriptions regarding the purposes and conduct of our schools have gone to Washington, D.C. What has come back to local schools and their communities nationwide are mandates for raising test scores on a narrow band of school subjects, test scores that do not correlate with the traits we expect good education to develop in the young. The well-being of both our children and our democracy is at stake.

The political and business leaders who have taken on the mantle of “school reform” (a nasty concept) have

let us down. Their linear input-output model of change has proven itself bankrupt through repeated failure. The time has come for a new model—born of inquiry and grassroots trial—new players, and the dawning of a new day for our schools. The time has come for the centers of conversation, policy, and action to be in the towns and hamlets of this broad land. Interestingly, what educators, parents, and large numbers of other adults want for the children we must all learn to live with—personal, social, vocational, and intellectual development—squares with what education is. They must now come together in the simultaneous renewal of both our elementary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions and our democracy.

For nearly two decades, the Institute for Educational Inquiry, supported by a clutch of philanthropic foundations, has worked with a network of school-university partnerships, the National Network for Educational Renewal, in advancing an inquiry-based initiative of such renewal: the Agenda for Education in a Democracy. It became increasingly apparent as work progressed that we will not have schools and a democracy that continuously remake themselves unless the American people envision the need, develop the will, and begin the conversation. As the late historian Lawrence Cremin responded to the question “What do we do when we have tough problems to solve?: “We talk.”

Three of my colleagues decided several years ago that the strategy built into the Agenda for simultaneously renewing schools and teacher-preparing programs was missing a partner: the

people who pay the taxes and in other ways support our schools. As political scientist Benjamin Barber points out, schools serve a public purpose: They *create* a public. Educators and the lay public need to be jointly engaged in defining the characteristics of a responsible democratic public and ensuring for everyone the education necessary to individual, collective, and environmental well-being. The challenge is not one to be left to our political and corporate leaders.

Colleagues Mona Bailey, Corinne Mantle-Bromley, and Carol Wilson worked long hours developing a proposal—not a blueprint—for building into the infrastructure of the Agenda for Education in a Democracy a strategy that offered promise of engaging the previously missing partner. With funding provided by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, they then embarked on a three-year journey of both anticipated and unanticipated experiences and extraordinarily gratifying learning. Some of what they experienced and learned is recounted in the stories that follow.

Some of the major lessons will now be built, given the necessary resources, into other initiatives of the Institute for Educational Inquiry such as the National Network for Educational Renewal, the League of Small Democratic Schools, and Journalism, Education, and the Public Good. It is gratifying to note that the urgency of renewing together our schools and our democracy is increasingly attracting the attention of journalists, educators, nonprofit agencies, philanthropies, and, I think, segments of the lay public. The call is to everyone.

INTRODUCTION

Carol A. Wilson, Mona H. Bailey, and Richard W. Clark

An overarching title figures in the stories that make up the bulk of this booklet. That is the title of the initiative out of which the stories grew: *Developing Networks of Responsibility to Educate America's Youths*, commonly referred to as *DN*. A description of the DN goals and objectives is provided later in this introduction, but here a brief description will serve. The DN initiative asked persons from schools, universities, and communities to work together to create a constituency of the whole and to develop the capacity to address issues arising from efforts to educate all students equitably and excellently. The initiative built on the belief that not only educators but also community members are stewards of our schools and as such hold responsibility for bringing the young into full participation in our social and political democracy. What better way to do that than by participating democratically themselves?

OF PREPOSITIONS AND PRONOUNS

One probably does not automatically think of *prepositions* and *pronouns* when thinking of stories, but in the stories in this booklet, these two parts of speech play key roles. In fact, they are the main characters. These are stories about how people have learned to work together—not to do something *for* someone else, or even *to* someone else, but *with* someone else. They are stories about transformations in relationships and in sense of self, individually and collectively. They are stories about how *I* becomes *we*, how *my* becomes *our*.

The language of collaboration stars in these stories: the language of teams' growing ever larger; of team members' being equal, no matter their "positions"; and of bringing unique perspectives

and talents to make a transformative, collective whole. Public philosopher John Gardner called this "creating a constituency of the whole," and this constituency continually develops its capacity to address community issues as they arise—and arise they will.

Many of the actors in these stories were newly arrived members of their communities. Together with established residents, they learned that the kinds of problems that need their collective attention and skills differ from routine ones that can more easily be solved by one person or a couple of people, experts in a particular area. These actors turned their energies toward what psychiatrist Ronald Heifitz calls "adaptive problems"—problems that do not lend themselves to an expert's solution. Rather, they require a variety of perspectives both to define them and then to develop appropriate responses to them, which means continually reaching out to others, thereby expanding the group or community. Groups working on adaptive problems have to learn their way into the problems and determine fitting responses. Tricky.

Setting comes into play here. In each of the situations related, a facilitator skilled at helping groups work together was present, usually in the background. Part of the facilitator's job involves providing a safe setting within which perspectives can be shared, trust can be built, relationships can develop. The facilitator knows the importance of keeping attention focused on how the group does its work so that actions taken and their results have substance and heart. The actions matter in a big way because they reflect the larger whole of the initiative.

THE DEVELOPING NETWORKS INITIATIVE

Developing Networks of Responsibility to Educate America's Youths (DN), a three-year initiative of the Institute for Educational Inquiry (IEI), was funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and was built upon the IEI's Agenda for Education in a Democracy. The purpose of this initiative was to engage and build the capacity of a partnership in each setting consisting of individuals from the community, the P-12 schools, and the university serving the community. The partnerships' ultimate goal was to improve and strengthen the schooling of youths in at-risk situations.

The IEI works with its partners, the Center for Educational Renewal (CER) at the University of Washington and the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER), on the renewal of schools and the education of educators. The NNER now consists of twenty-four settings in twenty states and one Canadian province. The mission of the IEI, CER, and NNER partnerships is to

- Provide children and youths with the skills and knowledge necessary for effective participation in a social and political democracy.
- Ensure access to quality knowledge for all learners.
- Promote a nurturing pedagogy.
- Ensure that educators are stewards of schools.

There is a heightened national and local awareness that many students, especially minority and poor students,

are not being served well by our schools. This awareness has led to the recognition that educators alone cannot provide the necessary education. Indeed, it has contributed to the realization that community members' voices must be heard regarding the public purposes of education and how these purposes are to be achieved. This realization produced the DN model initiated by the IEI in 2002. During the three years of the initiative and the ensuing follow-up year, DN expanded a select group of existing P-12 school and university partnerships to include a third partner: community members. Through a two-phase start-up process, ten sites were selected from among the NNER settings to participate. Three of the ten sites were selected to begin in year one, five in year two. Two were selected to observe the sites beginning in year one with the opportunity to apply for funding to implement the initiative in their communities later. Diverse in geography, demographics, and need, all ten participating sites received planning and implementation awards from the IEI's Kellogg grant to

- Implement year-long leadership programs in which participants share knowledge, develop collaborative leadership skills, and create action plans.
- Implement and evaluate approved action plans designed to increase the network of those responsible for the education of youths in the selected communities and address local educational needs.
- Disseminate learnings and models of collaboration from the work to local, regional, and national audiences.

The following sites participated in the DN initiative:

- Guadalupe, California/
Guadalupe Union School
District/Righetti High

School/California Polytechnic
State University

- Northeast School Collaborative of Denver and the University of Colorado at Denver
- Portal, Georgia, and Georgia Southern University
- El Paso, Texas, and the University of Texas at El Paso
- Oxford, Ohio, and Miami University of Ohio
- The Greater Campbell Complex (Campbell High School)/Ewa Beach Community/University of Hawaii at Manoa
- Wheeling, Illinois, and Illinois State University
- St. Cloud, Minnesota, and St. Cloud State University
- Lexington, Nebraska, and the University of Nebraska at Kearney
- Brooklyn, New York, and Medgar Evers College of The City University of New York

The work of these ten DN collaborative partnerships differed from the traditional work of the NNER settings. Eight of the ten participating sites began with the selection of an eighteen-member leadership team composed of six participating partners from the community, six from the P-12 schools, and six from the university. The community partners were not limited to the individuals commonly identified as community leaders. Rather, careful attention was given to the selection of people who had interest in, knowledge about, and a contribution to make to educational renewal in their communities but who were not typically part of the conversation. Several of the sites also had students serve as members of their leadership

teams. The remaining two of the ten sites began their work by observing other sites in the first year. After one year of observation, these two sites applied for and received grants to plan and implement DN initiatives in their communities.

Each site engaged in a year-long collaborative leadership program consisting of four multi-day sessions. Led by the skilled facilitators referred to earlier, these sessions included activities that helped participants learn about process and content, develop skills, and build relationships that enabled them to become a collaborative team. Additionally, the sessions used a scenario process to assess the community's needs and developed action plans to engage the wider community in the ongoing work of the DN initiative.

The final year of work for each of the sites focused on the implementation of the approved action plan and continued capacity building that would help the teams sustain their efforts. The IEI sponsored a conference in June 2005 to provide an opportunity for the ten sites to come together in Seattle to share their experiences, learnings, and plans for sustaining the work. A special feature of this conference was the participation of a three-member student team from each site. In addition to contributing to several sessions of the working conference, the students participated in sessions planned especially for them.

During the fourth, follow-up year, the IEI provided additional technical assistance at each site, representatives from the sites spent time in Seattle developing recommendations regarding how such initiatives can be sustained, and teams from fourteen NNER settings that had not been involved in the DN initiative participated in an intensive three-day workshop in Seattle to learn about the work and plan their own activities.

THE STORIES

This booklet contains five stories, reflections by people engaged in the DN initiative. The geographic and ethnic diversity of the settings is well represented, with stories of work in New York sharing space with stories from the heartland of the United States and a small coastal California community. Each author introduces his or her story by sharing a brief description of the setting and then narrates an incident or series of incidents about the community's efforts to engage a range of voices in strengthening the educational experiences of all children. Through the stories one learns of the challenges school- and university-based educators faced as they sought to engage with community members. Frequently, the communities were faced with finding ways of including newly arrived immigrant populations in their conversations.

For many who seek political solutions to strengthening the educational enterprise, the task seems simple. Federal, state, and local authorities act as if they can solve the system's ailments by creating policies that establish high standards and test students to make sure that those standards are being met. There is nothing in the following stories that suggests there should not be high expectations for student performance, but there is plenty of evidence that the task of shaping educational experiences that are valuable for all children is much more complicated and difficult than simply increasing pressure on systems to be accountable. The very diversity that makes the nation strong creates challenges that demand local solutions by educators working in close harmony with a wide array of community members.

CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS

Following the five stories, Ann Foster, the evaluator of the DN initiative during its first three years, shares her observations about the way process, content, and action played out across all ten settings. Her analysis provides a broader context for the local stories.

Finally, because initiatives such as DN too often wither and die after the early efforts and funding pass, Dick Clark provides a brief summary statement that draws on a discussion among participants from the ten DN sites. This summary, titled "Sustaining Collaborative Engagement," analyzes the difficulties faced by initiatives such as this and identifies keys to sustaining them.

IMMIGRATION'S HUMAN FACE

Jerry Bergstrom

The University of Nebraska at Kearney and Pershing Elementary School in Lexington, Nebraska, are located in South Central Nebraska, along the parallel routes taken by the Platte River, Interstate 80, and the Union Pacific Railroad. The university is just thirty-five miles east of Lexington, in an area that is the center of the migration route of whooping and sandhill cranes, ducks, geese, and shore birds. More significantly for us, the Platte River Valley has formed the great historic migration route for people from the eastern United States to the Great American West. The overlapping California, Oregon, and Mormon Trails run along the valley. To this day, the great Platte River Road remains one of the most heavily traveled routes in the world. Interstate 80 and the Union Pacific carry more people and freight than any other route in America.

Today, the migration of people into and through this area continues. Immigrants from Mexico, Central America, South America, Cuba, the Pacific Islands, and Asia, as well as refugees from Africa, pour into this community in search of jobs, mostly in the beef-packing industry. In fifteen years, Lexington has changed from a community of 7,500 mostly white residents (with only 3 percent from minority groups) to a diverse community of more than 11,000 people, 60 percent of whom now come from formerly minority cultures. White children in our elementary school system, once the overwhelming majority, now represent only 15 percent of its population.

Nearly 30 percent of Lexington's students are learning English for the first time this year. More than half of its children, regardless of their English proficiency, speak a language other

than English as their native tongue. Approximately a third of their parents are either illiterate or have had very limited educational opportunities. Forty percent of the parents of Lexington's students speak no English or have very limited English skills. Seventy-eight percent of the students come from backgrounds of poverty. And the mobility rate of school populations varies from a low of 40 percent to a high of 68 percent each year. Clearly, the demographic changes in Lexington—the high poverty levels, cultural diversity, mobility, and language barriers—have presented the community and its schools with formidable challenges.

Furthermore, many of our children come to us from homes where parents cannot help them with schoolwork, either because of time constraints or because of limited abilities with English. Children often care for younger siblings, and time that might be spent on their studies is instead devoted to preparing meals, doing household chores, or, worse, watching TV. Because of language barriers, cultural differences, and the stresses associated with working in the beef-packing industry, many of the parents in the community have not engaged with its schools or with their children. It has not been uncommon for us to hear parents complain that their children no longer speak their native language—partly because those parents have little time or opportunity to interact with their children.

With all these difficulties confronting our area's students, parents, schools, and community, it was clear that we needed to work differently than we had in the past. As a result, in partnership with the university, Lexington's Pershing Elementary

School formed a network of people representing the diversity of our community with the aim of developing parent and community leaders who possessed the capacity to transform our learning community. Twenty-eight people received leadership training through the IEI and our Developing Networks partnership with UNK. Subsequently, these 28 leaders engaged over 180 people in three different study circles. The efforts of all these people interested in the success of their community resulted in significant programs for positively affecting the lives of our children, parents, and community. As a result of this work, a Community Welcome Center was formed; Together for Children, an existing program of dialogue with parents in the schools, was expanded; a Multicultural Commission was formed as an arm of the City Council; and annual diversity studies were begun at Lexington's high school.

One young woman who became involved in this work had come to Nebraska from Mexico in the eighth grade. Although she could not speak English, her father had insisted that she attend regular classes and work hard. She did that. She learned the language quickly and became a strong student. She participated in many school activities, including speech, music, tennis, and track and field. She competed at state speech competitions, was elected student body president, and served as a student representative to the Lexington Public School Board of Education. This young woman, Anna Garcia, graduated from Lexington High School with honors and enrolled in the University of Nebraska at Kearney, where she had been offered several scholarships.

While in high school, Anna was a student member of Lexington's leadership team, participating fully in all aspects of its work. Recognized by adults and students as a leader with much to give our community, she became a respected and honored member of the group. She felt transformed by her work with our network and community, and says the Developing Network initiative represented a "life-changing experience."

Anna helped our group comprehend the needs of the Latino community as we trained leadership participants in group facilitation skills and strategies. She clearly understood the power and wisdom available through the work of a diverse group of citizens. She listened carefully, summarized accurately, and clarified skillfully the thoughts, ideas, hopes, and dreams of our immigrant participants as we engaged in study circles on Parent Engagement, Immigration, and Breaking Boundaries.

Together with Carlos Sanchez, another student leader, Anna became skilled and confident enough during the training and subsequent work with our community to begin a series of study circles at the high school. Anna and Carlos selected study circle materials, garnered support from their principal, trained their own student facilitators, invited student participants, and conducted a five-week study circle process, which involved sixty students. As a result of their work, several other projects arose, encouraging students to spend time with groups with whom they normally did not engage. The positive work Anna and Carlos started continues, with annual study circles on diversity, increased participation by minorities in school activities, and an improved climate at the high school.

Because of Anna's early involvement in developing networks to support youths within the Lexington community, she was invited to attend a conference in Seattle in June 2005 as

part of our twelve-person team, which was to report to the conference on its success. During that conference, the young Ms. Garcia impressed the adults with her insight and presence. Her contributions to our group were substantial.

In order to see some of the Northwest from the ground level, Anna's group had traveled to Seattle via Amtrak, from Williston, North Dakota. Following the conference's conclusion, they boarded the train to return over the same route. In Havre, Montana, the train pulled to a routine and scheduled stop. In an episode that was far from routine, however, immigration officials boarded the train. They went directly to Anna, and began questioning her.

"After many questions, I was asked to get off the train," she recalls. "I was completely left behind in an unknown place, almost a thousand miles from my parents and my home. The officials told teachers and the principal traveling with me to get back on the train. I was very frightened!"

Anna Garcia and her family (mother Josefina; sister Teresa; and father Roberto) have lived in Nebraska since 2000 and have developed deep roots in their community. Her mother's relatives have been living in Lexington even longer and own several businesses in town. It was Anna's family's desire to reunite with those relatives that had prompted them to move to Nebraska.

Anna had been so busy with her school activities, graduation, and the work of the Developing Networks grant project, that she and the family had let her visa lapse. She had intended to complete her schooling and the trip to Seattle before returning with her family to Mexico in June to renew the visa. It was so important for her to help other communities learn from the successes of the DN work in Lexington that she decided the paperwork could wait for a bit.

But now, her future is uncertain.

In an ironic turn of events, Anna, who helped lead groups with immigration issues using the immigration study guide from the Study Circles Resource Center's *Changing Faces, Changing Communities*, now finds herself dealing personally with the polarizing issue of immigration. Anna faces a hearing in Omaha, Nebraska, to determine whether she will be allowed to remain in the United States. If she is allowed to stay, she hopes to become a teacher and return to an immigrant community to work with Latino children.

Many people who have met Anna have come forward with letters of support as she prepares for her hearing. Alison Brown, an attorney for Justice for Our Neighbors, a Methodist Church ministry, helped her with preparation for the hearing with INS. Jerry Bergstrom, a principal at Pershing Elementary School in Lexington and a director of the DN project in Lexington, says, "We all want her to remain in the United States and hope that someday she can return to Lexington to teach our children. We need her skills! We need her passion for children, for learning, and for our community. We need her to be a role model for our children. To show them that a young Latino woman who could not speak English a few short years ago can do great things! That *they* can do great things!"

Julie Fanselow, an independent writer for the Study Circles Resource Center writes: "Garcia has been heartened by this support, as well as by the many immigration rallies and marches organized across the country . . . [in spring 2006]. Some of the laws proposed in . . . Congress—such as the house bill (H.R. 4437) that would treat all illegal immigrants and people who help them as felons—are really, really scary."

Anna saw that when U.S. citizens attending a session were able to hear first-hand of their immigrant neighbors' experiences, they could make a connection. "People don't have

contacts with actual immigrants, and when they hear an immigrant's point of view, it helps them have a more open mind," she says. The studies on immigration also helped U.S. citizens who are frustrated with the current immigration system express their stories, too.

One aspect of the immigration debate Anna is following especially closely is the DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act, which would allow some immigrant students to continue their education in the United States. The Senate Judiciary Committee passed an earlier version of the DREAM Act with strong bipartisan support in 2003, but it did not reach the full Senate.

The DREAM Act was not passed in 2006, but it will undoubtedly resurface in the future. Anna remains hopeful, she says, "It means there's hope for me and thousands of other students." For Miss Garcia, and for others like her, things look brighter in Nebraska. On

April 13, 2006, the Nebraska Legislature passed a law allowing children of illegal immigrants to qualify for in-state tuition at state colleges and universities if they have lived in the state three years, graduated from a Nebraska high school, and pledged to seek legal status. Nine other states have passed similar laws.

Anna credits her family and her faith for giving her the strength to work through this difficult time. "My belief in God plays a huge role in getting me through this," she adds. "It has been a blessing to be here. It is important to emphasize that my family and I are very thankful for the United States and the home it has provided for us." She says that the leadership skills she learned through the Developing Networks training, the facilitation training for study circles, her involvement in school activities, and her involvement in service to the community has helped her as her case makes its way through the legal system.

Because of Anna's courageous participation in the Developing Networks initiative in Lexington, others in the community have rallied to the needs of immigrants in our community. New leadership teams have been trained and will continue the efforts to make Lexington a better place for all residents, whether documented, undocumented, citizens, or citizens to be. Two rallies were held during spring 2006 in support of immigrants' rights. Many people have come forward offering financial support to Anna as she works through the hearing process with INS.

It is safe to say that the migration of people into and through this area will continue to have a major impact on the economy, on the culture of our community, and on the vitality of the region. The DN process and the use of study circles helps bring people together to resolve conflicts, to build understanding, and to solve problems facing the people of this community on the Great Platte River Road.

COMING BACK TO SCHOOL

Gregg Crocker, Karen Daly Klein, Rosario Olave, Patricia Salvatini, and JoNancy Warren

School District 21, in Wheeling, Illinois, is a large elementary district, with nine elementary schools and three middle schools. It serves families living in five different northwest Chicago suburbs. Its students are 41 percent Hispanic, and more than 30 percent of its students qualify for bilingual services because of limited English proficiency.

Over time, a growing chasm of communication had arisen between Spanish-speaking families and the schools. It wasn't a lack of either effort or motivation that lay behind the district's limited success with its Spanish-speaking families, however. The teachers and administrators of School District 21 wanted to do something to help. But the individual efforts of schools and teachers, while worthy, were just that—individual. Our community needed a community effort.

Then, through a Developing Networks grant, District 21 was able to gather together community members in hopes of creating meaningful representation for our diverse community. Teachers, administrators, parents, local politicians, and representatives from the local park district were included. Although the leaders were diverse, one very important common thread ran through them all—everyone on the team cared deeply about the success of all of the members of the Wheeling community.

The leadership group met for more than a year, getting to know each other, building trust, sharing ideas. The primary goal that the group members identified was providing opportunities for our Spanish-speaking parents and children in order to strengthen their relationships with the schools and other

community organizations. The leadership group was aware that the academic and social success of the children in the community depended to a large extent on the success of their parents. Group members not only wanted to serve the whole family, they knew we had to. This goal was lofty, yes, but they believed it to be realistic. Excitement over the possibilities seemed contagious.

But after a year, although the conversations were increasingly valuable to the community members involved, nothing tangible seemed to be happening. The leadership team knew that if something concrete and significant didn't occur soon, the momentum would be lost, as would this opportunity to make a difference in the lives of the members of our community.

We did at last succeed—despite our worries and fears. And, just as the community we served had many faces, so did the stories of how we succeeded. Different doors opened up on different opportunities. In honor of coming at last to hear the many varied members of our community family, we let our story, too, come through several voices.

ROSARIO OLAVE

I work with the Early Childhood Program in District 21, primarily serving our Spanish-speaking families. I was invited to participate in the original leadership group. There were a lot of meetings, conversations, ideas. It seemed interesting but slow going and not too productive. But then our efforts and ideas came together at last, during the first major community gathering, more than a year after starting, at what I call the “empowerment meeting.”

At an earlier planning meeting, different organizational members (from local churches to after-school program leaders, to the park district) had promised to invite, recruit, and even transport parents and children to this meeting. But I admit I had not been hopeful, because too often in education promises prove empty.

Not on this night.

For this meeting, I was asked to translate. I came to the podium, looked out at the room, and saw that it was filled with parents. They had their eyes and ears on me, waiting eagerly for the information I was to translate for them. There were more than one hundred people in attendance. Over one hundred! Nobody could believe it.

Having the privilege of being bicultural, I can sympathize with and understand what someone feels who is not a native speaker of this country. Although I was born and raised in Bolivia, I spent two years of my childhood in California, where I often felt left out because I couldn't understand my classmates. I am sure my parents felt the same fears that many of our immigrant families do today.

As I looked upon my neighbors, the parents of my students, and their friends and relatives, I felt a surge of electricity through my body. I told myself, this is the moment. This is the opportunity to make these families feel welcome and comfortable enough to be able to truly express themselves. And express themselves they did. We had divided the room into fifteen different tables, all of which were full. Each table had a Spanish-speaking leader from the school district or other community organization. The people who came

had an opportunity to share with community leaders what was working in the community: "The after-school program at my school is good for my son," said one. Some spoke about their frustrations with community services: "I don't need a basic English class; I need the next level of English." Others indicated that additional, affordable services were needed for them and their children: "We want to go to park district classes, but they cost too much money."

Looking upon the faces of the parents, I could see the possibilities. This night was different from any other meeting I had ever had with parents. It was as if the individuals felt the support of the group, and the ideas and honesty flowed. Instead of a half dozen parents attending a meeting where they received information, dozens came to give information. I was thrilled that so many people attended. As they let their voices be heard, I felt proud to have been a part of this night. Making something worthwhile come out of this meeting was more important than ever—no more empty promises. These families deserved it.

PATRICIA SALVATINI

It happened upon the leadership group by chance. When the group convened, I was new to District 21 and beginning a school-level leadership position. My principal asked me to attend this meeting (and the many that followed) as her representative. I jumped at the chance to become involved in the new community I was about to serve.

After what Rosario Olave calls the "empowerment meeting," I understood what all the meetings and discussions had been about.

For the first time, the members of the original leadership group were not just creating lists of what they imagined the Spanish-speaking families needed. This time, the families spoke for

themselves. Loudly and clearly. Community members at just about every table lamented the lack of affordable recreational activities and shared their experiences in struggling to be good parents in a new country with different cultural expectations. These were not adults lacking motivation; every group talked about the need and desire for work-related computer skills classes. Now I knew where we were going.

Rosa Kuhn, our technology teacher, became my partner in bringing the parents of Twain Elementary School together. From the large community meeting, we had learned that the families of District 21 wanted more support for their children's academics, more opportunities for adults to learn important skills, and affordable experiences for children to learn new things outside of school.

Those who attended our first parent meeting didn't hold back. Nearly a dozen parents and four district staff members sat around a large oval table. With butcher paper taped on the walls, ideas were collected one after another, until the conversation went faster than they could be recorded. Before the night was over, the parents had designed a program they wanted to be offered at Twain School. Even more, they made promises to help create and sustain it. And all heads nodded in promise to call and encourage their friends or neighbors to participate.

Together, we decided to offer English language and computer skills classes for Twain parents and dance and karate classes for Twain children. The park district was willing to staff the dance and karate classes. We would charge the families only \$1 per night per child, compared to the park district's regular class cost of close to \$100. We printed flyers and accepted early registration.

On the first night of classes, I had everything organized, hoping that a lot of people would show up to register.

They came . . . in droves. We took them all. For an hour and a half I took registration forms from over fifty families. These parents were thrilled to be a part of our program. And I was thrilled to have helped create an exciting opportunity for our families. Classes filled, and we didn't turn people away.

For a few, it has been very difficult to come to class, but they have found a way. They get a ride, they walk, they find a sitter for a sick child: they find a way.

This experience has opened doors for our parents. Many of them are relearning how to be students. Several have realized that coming to class and learning new things is not so hard after all, and they have gone on to take Spanish GED classes at the high school. One parent told me that it is important for her daughter to see her mother learning because it motivates the daughter to learn, too. Adrianna, a parent of two boys at Twain, told me that the program has brought her and her two children closer through this shared experience. "At dinner we talk about what I'm learning on the computers, and my boys like telling me what else I can do. They love knowing more than me and teaching me, too!"

We are opening doors for the adults in our community. My partner in the work, Rosa, helped the parents establish e-mail addresses. One mom now comes to the school a couple of times a week to check and send e-mail messages to and from her relatives in Mexico. Rosa taught her how to send digital pictures. One family, fairly new to the area, had relatives visiting from Mexico. Instead of staying home to be together, they brought the relatives to class.

We are also opening doors for children in our community. Marisol, a first grader who participates in the after-school program and whose kindergarten teacher was afraid she would struggle because of her shyness,

finds me almost every day and says in her unique way, “Mrs. Salvatini, I’m going to see you after school pretty soon.” “Yes,” I reply, “I’ll see you tonight (or tomorrow or on Thursday). I’m glad you enjoy coming.”

In the beginning, I confess I was overwhelmed with the organization and paperwork involved. I kept asking myself, “What are you doing?” I know I have learned better what works and what doesn’t. Now I get to worry about the long-term sustainability and growth of the program. I can worry about finding staff, whether we have a budget, and what we will offer to keep the parents and children coming. The look on the students’ faces as they lead their moms and dads into school – the proud smiles and the children’s hands pulling their parents’ outstretched arms – makes the time and effort worthwhile.

My husband asked me when classes would be over and whether I would be home again on Thursday nights. I just smiled. I know in my heart that these classes should never be over because we are opening doors in our community.

GREGG CROCKER

When I began this journey, I was a retiring elementary school principal who had spent the last dozen or so years trying vigorously to bridge the growing gap between the Spanish-speaking families and my school. This new challenge was greater, however, because it wasn’t just about my school – it involved the entire district.

Through the first two years of the initiative, I was like everyone else on the leadership team – an employee of District 21 working the extra hours to try to make something worthwhile happen for our Spanish-speaking families. As the third year of our work approached, however, so did my retirement.

But instead of the retirement I had expected, a new opportunity unexpectedly appeared. The superintendent and the board of education approved a new role for me – as Community Involvement Coordinator. I took this new role as a sign of hope for our efforts. I saw my objective in my new position to be both simple and complex: to create tangible and successful community-based programs for the silent voices of our district. The board of education and the superintendent recognized that without ideological and financial support, any genuine success would likely be scarce and hardly sustainable.

In an effort to expand our efforts beyond the schoolhouse walls, the Wheeling Park District was a natural choice for a partner in our endeavors. Their programs were attractive to our Spanish-speaking families, but they were often not affordable. While we could have created and sustained a limited community program with school district staff alone, we believed our families would be more interested in programs offered in conjunction with the park district. After many discussions, the park district committed more than \$15,000 in funds and personnel to ensure the success of the school programs, first at Twain Elementary, and then at three other elementary schools. This collaboration allowed the school district efforts to move forward and enabled the park district to strengthen its own connections with the Spanish-speaking families.

It was imperative that the purpose of our work be consistent across the district. But it was equally important that individual school programs be flexible enough to meet each local school community’s needs. After Twain’s early success, we used its program as a model. We invited parents from Twain to talk to parents from three other elementary schools about their experiences. When parents from across the district heard from other parents (instead of from teachers)

that “our kids wanted to come back to school” and “we’re learning skills that are important,” they began to realize the possibilities. I could see and hear the excitement building as parents asked more questions of their peers. “Is it really okay if we don’t have our own computers?” “What if my husband can’t come but I want to?” There was a spark of hopefulness in the crowd as the Twain parents demonstrated their capacity for leadership and community participation.

Creating and supporting the efforts of the four schools (along with managing after-school tutoring programs in three other elementary schools) requires, of course, the leadership and commitment of the schools’ teachers. Without staff at each school “worrying” about the process and making sure that events are well organized, this project would not be successful. Our parents and children have participated for many reasons, not the least of which is that they see familiar faces at every event.

Our work, while messy and prolonged at times because of its democratic nature, expressed belief in people and gave them a chance to be successful on their own terms. This whole process was just that: a process, an ever-changing, flexible process. We saw that we had to be able to shift our own values and goals so that they supported those families we hoped to serve. Every mother and father who returned to school, both to learn and to be an active participant in the community, increased the chance of a genuine connection to the school and enhanced her or his opportunity to be an integral member of the community.

In the long term, I hope to continue to provide our families with experiences that can allow them to understand the invaluable role they can and do play in the development of their children and their community. Fortunately, our board of education and superintendent have committed to continue financial support for our programs, which are

going to expand into the 2006-07 school year. Five of our elementary schools and all three middle schools will have unique, site-specific programs based largely on what our original “silent

voices” told us was needed during community meetings. These programs are not only about acquiring English, understanding computers, or assimilating into a new country. These

programs are also about learning how to access opportunities, realizing that our community can be a safe and inviting place, and coming to see that *learning* is a way of life.

NOT EVEN HORSES CAN PULL BACK WORDS

Gayla Holmgren-Hoeller

St. Cloud, Minnesota, is a city of 68,000 about seventy miles northeast of Minneapolis and St. Paul on the banks of the Mississippi River. It has evolved from an agricultural community into a thriving retail, business, and health center for central Minnesota. Early settlers were predominantly German, and even today the area is still known for its abundant and devout Catholic population.

The greater St. Cloud area's population has steadily grown from 40,000 in 1970 to 160,000 today, which represents about 5 percent of the state's population. Within the last ten years, immigrants and refugees settling in the St. Cloud area have significantly contributed to its population growth.

With nearly ten thousand students, the St. Cloud School District is the largest in central Minnesota. The district comprises two high schools, two middle schools, eight elementary schools, one preschool, and two alternative programs. It spans 250 square miles, including nine St. Cloud area communities with diverse populations of students. English-as-a-second-language students in the public school system represent more than thirty-five different native languages. Poverty and mobility challenge the school district. Districtwide, the free and reduced lunch rate is 36 percent; however, some area elementary schools offer free and reduced lunches to more than 60 percent of their students. Almost a fifth of the students in the district move from their residences during the school year, but for some schools the mobility rate is greater than 60 percent, and there are even teachers whose classes experience 100 percent mobility from the beginning to the end of the school year.

Spanish-speaking, Vietnamese, and Laotian immigrant populations have all seen large increases in the past decade, and increasing numbers of African American students have relocated from cities such as Detroit and Chicago. The most unanticipated change, however, was a large influx of Somali refugees.

Since Somalia's civil war erupted in 1991, Minnesota has welcomed thousands of Somali refugees, most of whom settled in the Minneapolis-St. Paul and St. Cloud areas. So many Somalis have come to the state that Minnesota is referred to as the capital of the Somali community in North America.

This dramatic influx of Somali refugees, along with increases in other immigrant ethnic populations, presented challenges to both the community and the school district. The local schools and area neighborhoods witnessed verbal and physical confrontations between Somali refugees and the local black community. An alarming number of "hate crimes" resulted from friction between immigrant cultural groups' values and a local bias, resulting in the community's being referred to in some circles as "White Cloud."

In September 2002, threats were painted on a Mediterranean restaurant and grocery store known as the local headquarters for Somali refugees. That same day, another store, owned by an Ethiopian immigrant, was defaced. The following November, \$8,000 worth of damage was done to a Somali business when racist messages were spray-painted on the exterior brick wall and front glass door. The city council reacted by passing a resolution creating a zero tolerance standard for racism and discrimination. But in December, an

arsonist started a fire in a shed at the Somali mosque.

Racist behaviors and conflicts between cultures would often begin in school and carry over into the low-income neighborhoods that the African Americans and Somalis co-inhabited. At other times, conflicts began in the neighborhoods and spilled over into the schools. The local newspaper's opinion page asked whether fear or hate was more responsible for the violence and crimes.

By summer 2003, the U.S. attorney and FBI special agents had joined local law enforcement, convening a town hall style meeting to talk about curbing racism in the community. Nevertheless, reports of racist messages and graffiti continued to escalate. By the end of 2003, St. Cloud, the ninth largest city in Minnesota, had the state's second greatest number of race-based incidents, exceeded only by the much-larger Minneapolis.

This was the climate in which our DN partnership began its efforts. We sought to form a collaborative team of university, school district, and community leaders with the mission of developing a plan to address local issues related to youths in at-risk situations. When I shared this mission with school district educators, it was not difficult to recruit P-12 representatives. Our school district team members included two elementary principals, a middle school principal, an English Language Learner teacher, and an elementary teacher. All were from district schools with high levels of both diversity and poverty. All were white.

My counterpart at the university also had little difficulty recruiting

university representatives. The university's contingent had a little greater diversity, including a faculty member of Korean descent and a Latino.

Recruiting diverse representatives from the community, we agreed, would be vital to the success of our DN planning team. We would need to recruit participants who reflected the variety of our changing community. Participation from the African American and Somali populations was crucial. In order to recruit community participants for the planning team that would meet later that year in northern Minnesota, we enlisted the help of the school district's diversity coordinator, a man who himself hailed from Africa. The diversity coordinator identified a couple of Somali leaders in the community to include on the team. We also invited potential African American leaders, including a single parent mother of four elementary students and a manager from Gold'n Plump Poultry, an enterprise that employs numerous Somali and Latino adults from the community.

On a June morning, we headed into our initial full-day organizational meeting at the Holiday Inn in St. Cloud. Our group felt confident. Our eighteen-person team was in place for the nine days of leadership training and team planning that would take place later in northern Minnesota. We were enthusiastic, and we anticipated that this would be a diverse, productive university/school district/community team. We arranged the room, set up our equipment, and waited for our team members. The team of university and school district participants arrived. Eight a.m. rolled by, then 8:30. No community members. We waited. Nine o'clock came, then 9:30. Not a single community representative showed up. We were crestfallen. The DN goal had been to bring the community into the partnership. How had our plans fallen through?

After some investigation, we learned that the school district diversity coordinator who had done the early, vital recruiting in the Somali community had, in the meantime, returned to Africa to visit a sick mother. Visa problems had prevented his return to the United States. Thus, he had been unable to follow up with the community members he had recruited, and nothing had been done to pick up where he had left off.

As we pondered this set of developments, another issue occurred to us: We had assumed that our community members would have no trouble taking the ten days off work to serve on the DN team. But now we asked ourselves why we had made that assumption. Couldn't that have been why they hadn't shown up? Was it that they would have had to take vacation days or days without pay to participate? On reflection, it had been unrealistic to ask for such a commitment from community members, no matter how dedicated they might be to improving conditions for youth populations. It had been a naive and serious oversight.

Shortly afterward, I began again, starting from scratch, hoping once again to recruit the same team members, but this time determined to reduce the obstacles to their involvement. I started at the top—with the mayor. I hoped that my twenty-plus years in the school district as a high school principal and assistant superintendent and my attending numerous meetings over the years with the mayor (though I did not know him personally) would make arranging a meeting with him easier.

I knew that he, too, had been appalled at the hate crimes and discrimination our community was experiencing, and I was aware that he had started a citywide initiative in response to racism. This initiative, called CreatCommUnity, consisted of key committees working to eliminate bias and discrimination in their respective areas: education, housing, government,

business, faith communities, health, and human services.

The mayor agreed to meet, and we spent thirty minutes discussing the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER) and the DN initiative. I suggested we collaborate with CreatCommUnity, and I asked him for his recommendation on how to secure the involvement of the Somali and African American community leaders on the DN team. He agreed wholeheartedly that we should be collaborating with CreatCommUnity.

In order to secure the Somali and African American leaders' involvement, the mayor also offered the assistance of the city's Human Rights Officer. She was trusted and respected by both minority communities. I asked for her help in enlisting the two Somali community leaders we had identified. She set up individual meetings for me with Khalid (who was the Founder and Executive Director of the St. Cloud Area Somali Salvation Organization) and Omar (Program Manager for Refugee and Employment Services with the Somali population) and joined our meetings for the first fifteen or twenty minutes. Her rapport and good relationship with both men was evident. They were meeting with me out of their respect for her. I carefully and fully explained the commitment that we were asking of them—three three-day meetings, away from their work and home responsibilities, and involvement with the action plans we developed. Both expressed some interest.

But for Omar, the prospect of having to use vacation days in order to participate was in fact a major issue. So we sought out his supervisor at Lutheran Social Services in St. Cloud, and after we explained the NNER and the DN initiative and she saw how the DN initiative would support Omar's work, she agreed to seek permission for him to attend the DN sessions as part of his job.

We had identified two further potential team members who were also employed, so after giving them individual “presentations” and getting their personal commitments, I again met with their supervisors to try to work out the time-off issues. Brian was employed by Catholic Charities and worked at the Boys and Girls Club, serving a population of black students from a low-income housing development with both African American and Somali families. Karen was the Training and Development Manager at Gold’n Plump Poultry. In both cases, when I originally recruited them for the DN team, I had spoken briefly with their supervisors. But I had not gone into detail on the expectations for their involvement, nor had I specifically asked for their agreement to release them from their job responsibilities with pay for the nine days of meetings.

Both supervisors were colleagues of mine in the local Rotary Club, where I had been a member for fifteen years. After our meetings, they clearly saw the importance of the work of the DN team and the commonality of the missions and interests of their organizations and the DN initiative. As a result, both supervisors permitted their respective employees to attend the DN retreats on company time.

My last community member recruit was a young single mother of four elementary students, a woman currently attending college. The greatest obstacle to her involvement lay in providing care for her children. She ordinarily received assistance from family members, but overnight stays away were too much to ask of them. We were able to arrange for a stipend to help with childcare costs while she attended the out-of-town workshops, and with that she agreed to be part of the team.

This three-week recruitment effort appeared to have borne fruit. But I knew the success most certainly was not because of me or my persuasive

abilities. The message, not the messenger, was the reason for the commitment from these community representatives and their supervisors and employers. Given the climate that had prevailed in the preceding months, it was evident that they all saw the value in what the DN initiative was attempting to do. Their personal visions and institutional missions aligned so closely with the Institute for Educational Inquiry’s agenda that they really could not decline involvement.

Before our first three-day retreat in September, we called all team members and set up their accommodations at a resort in the Northern Woods of Minnesota. We sent out reading materials and an agenda. I personally checked on each person’s transportation plans. Yet, as I waited that first morning with our DN facilitators, I was nervous about how many of the community members would show up. We arranged the room, set up our equipment, and then waited for team members.

Eight a.m. arrived, and the entire team assembled, including *all* seven community members. Yes!

Now that we had the team assembled, we began the DN leadership and team building. We knew we were dealing with issues of grave importance to our community. With seven minority representatives (a Korean, a Latino, three African Americans, two Somalis) and eleven whites, this was the most diverse committee I had witnessed in my twenty years in the St. Cloud Schools. It was not surprising, then, that tensions sometimes ran high in our discussions, especially when we began to talk about action plans. School district representatives lobbied hard that the English Language Learners in our community needed to be the focus of our action plans, because the schools were so unprepared and the refugees’ needs so great. African American leaders on the team argued that the youths in at-risk situations in their communities had just as many needs.

During those first days, we felt segmented and cliquish. We seemed to mirror the cultural conflicts and lack of trust existing in the St. Cloud community. Participants were quick to interrupt each other when they didn’t agree and rolled their eyes and whispered among themselves. I caught the school principals several times in not-so-subtle glances of exasperation. Around the meeting table, the school district people sat together. The African Americans sat by themselves. The university faculty members also sat together. Even our lunches and breaks were segmented. Team members spent their free time with like team members, privately talking about work and family matters.

On several occasions, tempers flared—about which student group, for instance, should be the focus of our effort. Reassurances that we would eventually follow up with additional goals on other populations were met with questioning and doubtful looks. Our team reflected the lack of trust and the cultural conflict existing in the St. Cloud community.

Then, unexpectedly, a moment occurred that changed everything, a moment when awareness became reality and acceptance the norm. It was during our second session, in mid-November, at a resort in northern Minnesota. We had been asked to read Chapter 11 from *Making a Difference in the Lives of Bilingual/Bicultural Children*, a piece entitled “Parents as Guardians of the Mother Tongue” by Rebecca Blum-Martinez. The article tells the story of teachers in an elementary school who misjudge parents of their bilingual students because of a lack of cultural awareness. It was 6:30 p.m. We had just finished dinner, and the discussion seemed lackluster. The agenda had said this was a time for discussion and storytelling, so I asked each of the team members from various cultures if they could share a story about a time when their cultural traditions and mores had been misinterpreted by well-meaning members of the American culture.

For the next hour and half, they kept us spellbound. Arturo volunteered first and told a story from his childhood. He was in grade school when the teachers in his school, unannounced, decided to visit the homes of their best students, to share with parents the positive attributes of these children and their academic successes. Arturo was one of the students whose accomplishments they wanted to honor in this way. But Arturo's mother did not speak English, so when the teachers visited, she did not understand a word of what they said.

The teachers promised they would return the following day, when Arturo's dad would be home. That evening, when his dad came home, Arturo's mother told him how the teachers had visited. Over Arturo's protests, his father assumed—as was common in his culture—that the teachers had come to the home of their student because the student had done something reprehensible. And Arturo's dad gave him a licking.

The following day, the teachers again visited Arturo's home and praised his accomplishments in school to both of his parents. Hearing this, Arturo thought he might get an apology from his father for the licking, but none, he lamented to the group, was forthcoming, on that day or any day since.

Omar and others followed Arturo with equally enlightening stories of cultural differences. We listened, more interested in each other than before. And then came a transformational moment, created by Joo-Eun. We had come to know Joo-Eun as a woman of

few words. I am certain she had never verbally contributed to discussions in our large DN group, nor had she said much in small-group discussions. But this night, when asked to share her cultural story, she jumped to her feet and began writing elaborate and beautiful Korean letters on the large white easel paper in the front of the room. When she finished, she read the Korean words to us and then wrote the translation: "Speak carefully; not even horses can pull back words once spoken."

Joo-Eun then told the story of applying and interviewing for her position as a teacher of child and family studies at the university. She explained that at the interview she had been expected to share all her positive qualifications and attributes. This, she indicated, was in conflict with a major cultural belief: One did not expound on one's own abilities and accomplishments to others. One did not speak unless one had something really important to say; because once spoken "not even horses can pull back words."

She recalled that she had explained this cultural expectation to the interview committee and afterward did not answer their question about why she was a good candidate for the position. She left unsaid that she was given the tenure-track faculty position despite her not having answered their question.

The room was silent when Joo-Eun finished. Quietly, she returned to her seat. She stared at her hands in silence. There was a long, poignant pause. No one spoke. No one moved. We looked at Joo-Eun. She rarely spoke, but today,

she had been eloquent. Thought furrowed our brows as we pondered Joo-Eun's story. She had defied her interviewers' expectations and stayed true to her traditions. She had refused to answer their question but was still offered the tenure-track position. Very carefully, people began to glance sidelong at each other, exchanging looks that said "Wow! What had we witnessed?" Simultaneously, a new level of respect for Joo-Eun was evident in every face. She had chosen this moment, and our team, to act against the constraints of her culture, to get up in front of the group, and to speak about herself and share a very personal story. That the story itself had been about honoring the cultural value against speaking about oneself made it even more powerful. Her story had explained so much about who she was and about her reserved relationship with her colleagues and the team, and it had said so much about the respect she had for the group.

After that, team members sat straighter, taller, their shoulders back. There was electricity in the air. I think we all felt privileged to have been witness to Joo-Eun's story. Heads nodded as in agreement when someone reiterated, "We are not all alike, and that is a good thing." We heaved a collective sigh as we genuinely came to realize that we needed to look deeper and accept and value cultural differences. From that point on, we did. We were more respectful of each other. We listened more and valued what others had to say.

Awareness became reality and acceptance the norm. We became a team.

A TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEY

Noreen Hosier

Medgar Evers College, of the City University of New York, is located in Central Brooklyn, an area composed of ethnically diverse neighborhoods such as Bedford Stuyvesant, Fort Greene, Crown Heights, East New York, Brownsville, Flatbush, and East Flatbush. Central Brooklyn has the largest concentration in New York of American-born black residents, with a number of newer immigrant residents from throughout the Caribbean, Africa, Central America, and South America.

Most of the time, the groups peacefully coexist, and the community relishes and celebrates its diversity with such events as the renowned West Indian Day Carnival and the International African Arts Festival, held annually on Labor Day. In the Crown Heights neighborhood, some separatism remains, most evident in the self-imposed isolation of its Hasidic Jewish community.

Lately, as a result of the inflated housing market in New York City, increasing numbers of young middle-class and affluent whites have moved into several of Brooklyn's neighborhoods, notably Bedford Stuyvesant, Fort Greene, Crown Heights, and Flatbush. Unfortunately, however, the increased value of Central Brooklyn real estate has not done anything to alleviate the urban social ills that have plagued Central Brooklyn. High unemployment, low-performing schools, teen pregnancy, violent drug-related crime, and gang activity continue to put Central Brooklyn youths at risk.

In 1999, the Medgar Evers College Learning Community Network (LCN) was created to formalize and maintain meaningful relationships among local

community school districts, businesses, and religious and cultural institutions. Its aim was to address the critical issues confronting education in Central Brooklyn. Over the years, the LCN has gained recognition among local schools and cultural institutions.

I am the Learning Community Network Coordinator. I am also the Coordinator of Early Field and Clinical Experience for Medgar Evers College. People have always described me as a "natural leader," and my career path reflects this assessment. In addition to having been a middle school principal and college coordinator, I was a classroom teacher and district-level administrator. My belief in my effectiveness in leadership positions was enhanced by various experiences along the way. I pursued and accepted each of these positions with the belief that I could make a difference in the lives of children – with the emphasis on "I."

More than a decade ago, however, during my participation with in the Yale University-based School Development Program (SDP), I came to realize that the task-oriented, autocratic leadership style is only one of many ways to lead, and it is not always the most effective one. Practicing the SDP principles and implementing the process in our middle school, I began to embrace the concept of participative, collaborative leadership. I sought out a more comprehensive understanding of the essential role that partnerships between school and community play in achieving successful outcomes for students and, in particular, for students in at-risk situations.

When I was introduced to the Developing Networks initiative, I assumed that the "primary contact

person" role was comparable to my current position as LCN Coordinator. In that position, I held responsibility for the development, facilitation, and assessment of LCN meetings and events. Moreover, the LCN membership represented local P-12 schools, college faculty, and the broader community. It was not difficult, then, to consider how to form a DN initiative Steering Committee of three LCN members: one person from a P-12 school, a person from the broader community, and me from the university level.

Since I was accustomed to taking a lead role, I reflexively undertook the responsibility for overseeing the application and submission of documents. Upon notification that Central Brooklyn had received one of the planning grants, I just as reflexively forged ahead with organizing an eighteen-member leadership team. During a spring 2003 LCN breakfast meeting, I presented the membership with an overview of the DN initiative and invited members to submit a brief letter that described their interest, capacity, and commitment to participate on a Central Brooklyn Leadership Team.

In my enthusiasm to keep the process moving, I assumed sole responsibility for making logistical decisions and preparations for the upcoming Leadership Academy. It never occurred to me that I was unconsciously lapsing back into an autocratic style of leadership. Fortunately, two Steering Committee members voiced their willingness to perform – cooperatively – the tasks at hand. Their interest in doing the work as a team compelled me to reassess how I had begun to approach the work. And once again, just as had my experiences

with SDP at Yale a decade earlier, the outcomes that the Steering Committee produced confirmed for me the value of making collaborative decisions and sharing a variety of tasks. Thus began my transition from the autocratic coordinator of the Medgar Evers College Learning Community Network to a collaborative partner of the Steering Committee.

An essential role of the Leadership Team was to develop an action plan that addressed specific concerns regarding the local community's youths and strategies to address the identified concerns. With the skillful guidance of our two program facilitators, the Central Brooklyn Leadership Team worked hard to ensure that both the usual and not so usual voices were heard.

During the team's working sessions, several of these voices were raised. It quickly became clear that many team members were not bashful about articulating their thoughts and concerns. "At our first weekend meeting," said one participant, a psychotherapist, "I began to feel like a fish out of water. Everyone was talking about the academic needs of the children in Central Brooklyn and didn't seem to be aware of how important their emotional and social needs were to achieving any type of lasting change. I thought about leaving the group." A parent voiced her concern just as forcefully: "When I joined . . . I had strong feelings of what the voice of the student and the parent should represent. I know that too often parents and students are not heard and [are] taken very lightly."

These voices pointed out to the team that our action plan needed to focus on engaging youths in opportunities to discuss their needs and desires. Said one team member, a teacher, "I saw a need to reach out to the community and try to find ways for everyone to be heard, especially our youths." Most importantly, we saw a need to increase the capacity of youths

to be successful through leadership development. Fortunately, the will was there. "Work with young people seemed to be a common thread connecting almost all members of the committee," said the teacher. Through adherence to and faithful application of group-process skills developed during the Leadership Academy, we built a foundation that supported our collaborative work. By the end of the formal Leadership Academy, the team identified the primary focus of the Central Brooklyn action plan: "What Central Brooklyn youths need to know and be able to do to be successful in life."

In order to gain additional input and to finalize strategies, the eighteen members of the Leadership Team were supposed to share the action plan draft with their respective groups, such as college faculty and students; P-12 school faculty, students, and parents; and community organization members. Unfortunately, during a follow-up Leadership Team meeting, team members realized that the next phase of our work would face some obstacles. Personal life changes for two team members required them to move out of New York City, terminating their participation. Poor health and job-related responsibilities also hampered several other team members' active participation and follow-through on assignments.

Moreover, even though we had agreed upon a collaborative model and specified what people would be responsible for doing, many members of the Leadership Team, previously LCN members, were accustomed to my "leading the way." They expected me to be the autocratic leader they had come to know. I was concerned about how the collaborative process that I had embraced would work in Central Brooklyn. I began to question whether collaborative leadership could actually be effective in diverse groups, especially ones whose members reported to higher "authorities," such as the New York City Department of Education. I felt

uneasy; my newfound but shaky trust and confidence in the collaborative team process reinforced a sudden desire to do the comfortable thing and revert back to my old autocratic control.

I shared my concerns with our DN facilitators. They reminded me that with other disparate groups, collaborative work had taken time to take hold. In other places, it had required ongoing professional development to enhance group skills and process. So collaboration was not likely to take root and work quickly here, either. The words of a former district superintendent resonated in my head. He had once warned during a long and difficult implementation project that people could change only themselves. With his wisdom in my mind and the support of my two colleagues on the Steering Committee, I recommitted myself. The Central Brooklyn DN initiative moved into Year Two.

We began the implementation phase of the initiative with a full-year schedule of events, assessment strategies, and most importantly, new Leadership Team members to expand and revive the original eighteen-member team. During the activities and events, the voices of Central Brooklyn youths, families, and the broader community were given ample opportunities to be heard. The success of Year Two's action plan seemed to indicate that collaboratively the Central Brooklyn Leadership Team was meeting its goal of providing access to "what Central Brooklyn youths need to know and be able to do to be successful in life." Each successful activity or event led to ideas and thoughts about the next planned step. Sometimes, the participants' feedback and the team's assessments of completed activities led to modifications of our original action plan.

Authentic confirmation of our initiative came when some team members participated in and presented at the June 2005 DN Conference in

Seattle. The positive feedback from the other settings increased our confidence that we were indeed making a difference in the lives of Central Brooklyn youths. Following the conference, I was comfortable enough to go completely out of my comfort zone, the autocratic leadership style, as we moved into Year Three.

During that year, the initiative undertook a series of activities spearheaded by various team members. Members applied learnings acquired from their participation in the DN initiative to increase student success in their own organizations. Some of these activities were a black literature conference, a student-run P-6 school book store, a high school debate series, and a Celebrate Youth luncheon. It also

included a year-long college preparation program and spring college tour to Georgia to visit ten historically black colleges. On another trip, fifty middle school and high school students from Brooklyn traveled to Yale University, where they linked with students from the local high schools as well as from Yale to discuss what youths need to know and be able to do to be successful in life.

The Medgar Evers College Learning Community Network was officially changed to The Learning Community Network @ Medgar Evers College. The Steering Committee decided to change the name to reflect not only the transition of LCN from words to action, but also the transformation of my leadership style

from autocratic to collaborative. Our work continues. Said one member, a community leader and teacher, "The members of the Leadership Academy, although very diverse, jelled together beautifully. Holding on to 90 percent of the original members throughout the entire three-year span of the grant initiative is testimony in and of itself."

It is now our firmly held belief that through collaborative leadership, shared commitment, and capacity, The Learning Community Network is defined not by its coordinator or location, but by its work to address "what Central Brooklyn youths need to know and be able to do to be successful in life."

“WE ALWAYS HAVE HAD MUCH NEED”: THE PARENTS OF GUADALUPE SPEAK OUT

Anita Hernandez

The California town of Guadalupe, population 6,450, is located forty-five minutes south of California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo and ten miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. The Guadalupe Union School District is a small, rural district with two schools: a 750-student K-5 elementary school and a grade 6-8 middle school with 380 students. Of the K-8 students, 94 percent are Hispanic, mainly of Mexican origin. Half of the students are identified as English learners. Generally speaking, their parents head migrant families who are immigrant, limited-English speaking, and poor.

When Guadalupe’s students reach the ninth grade, they attend Righetti High School, one of four high schools in the more urban Santa Maria High School District, with 2,600 students in grades 9 to 12. Righetti is located in Orcutt, California – a predominantly white, middle- and upper-class community. Of the 300 Guadalupe students attending Righetti, about 125 are ninth graders. As might be predicted, the ethnic and socioeconomic differences between the upper- and middle-class whites and the mostly Hispanic and lower-income students from Guadalupe have produced some tensions at Righetti High School.

The California DN initiative work began in June 2002, when the Guadalupe Union School District, Righetti High School, and California Polytechnic State University came together to provide a forum that would allow the interaction and mutual assistance of Spanish-speaking parents representing the community, professors at Cal Poly, and local school teachers

and administrators. Cal Poly brought four members, and the Guadalupe School District brought twelve (including the superintendent, the principal and one teacher from each of the two schools, an instructional assistant, two students, and three parents). Righetti High School had but a single member, the interim principal. The following story describes the participation of three language-minority parents, two of whom were predominantly Spanish speaking and another who was bilingual.

THE PARENT REPRESENTATIVES

Luisa is Mexican born, and the mother of three children. Her ninth-grade daughter attended Righetti High School. Her parents had migrated when she was a teenager. She could not attend high school because she was expected to help support the family. Luisa acquired sufficient English to take care of essential everyday needs but not enough to have confidence in her command of the language. Nevertheless, she had a history of being involved in school committees and was invited to participate by the district’s Migrant Education Teacher.

Christina is a Mexican-born stay-at-home mother of three children. She immigrated to the United States as a young adult and, like Luisa, acquired only enough English to take care of everyday needs. She had a nine-year-old in Guadalupe’s schools, a teenage daughter who was to graduate from Righetti High School, and an adult son.

Maria is Mexican born and a mother of two elementary-age children,

the oldest of whom was in third grade. At the time we began the DN work, she was expecting her third child. She is Luisa’s sister. When her family immigrated to the United States, Maria was young enough that she entered and graduated from high school and became bilingual. She works for the county of Santa Barbara.

The involvement of the three mothers, rather than the fathers of the families, was not unusual. Studies of Mexican households in the United States have found that families adhere to traditional gender roles in terms of labor, child-rearing, and recreational and religious activities. Schooling is viewed as a part of the child-rearing domain and is usually left up to the mothers. The meetings involved two overnight stays at the hotel where the meetings were held. Fathers and children stayed there while the mothers attended the DN meetings.

All three of the mothers believed that small rural communities such as Guadalupe needed more resources for their youths. In the words of Christina:

Una de las razones que me involucré fue la necesidad que hay aquí en Guadalupe. Siempre hemos tenido mucha necesidad. [One of the reasons I became involved was because of the need that is here in Guadalupe. We have always had much need.]

Of the overall DN team, seven of the seventeen members spoke both Spanish and English. Parent representatives Luisa and Christina and one of the student representatives used

Spanish to communicate at the meetings. In order for them to be included and to contribute, it was necessary that Spanish be an integral part of the meetings. The two DN facilitators were bilingual and used both English and Spanish to communicate the DN agenda, providing shortened but succinct Spanish versions of information given in English and vice versa, as they moved from one agenda item to the next. Each of the bilingual team members assisted the two bilingual facilitators at different points in the meetings, breaks, and presentations to help monolingual participants gain understanding throughout the process.

Interestingly, this situation was different from using a translator, an intermediary person listening and translating the ideas for the speaker. Although it seemed that the facilitators were translating, in reality they were providing the information directly to both Spanish-speaking and English-speaking members. Said Christina,

Las traducciones fueron muy importantes. Entendía como un 75 por ciento. Cuando vas a un lugar, te da seguridad. . . . Era importante que todo fue bilingüe. Muy buen español. Realmente la comunidad es 75 habla hispana. Aun los cartelones que estaban en dos idiomas. [The translations were very important. I understood about 75 percent. When you go someplace, it (the translation) gives you security. It was important that everything was bilingual and with good Spanish. Really, the community is 75 percent Spanish speaking. Even the planning charts were in two languages.]

For Maria, it was not so much an issue of not understanding English, but of understanding the process of the unusual meetings:

Con las primeras juntas decía 'hay en que me metí.' No me sentía que podía ser parte de ese grupo. Si me sentía un

poco confundida y a la vez que no me tenía mucha confianza que fuera yo a poder participar, comprender, entender y poder hacer algo. Entonces con el paso del tiempo fue como fue tomando figura lo que realmente se buscaba. Y ya fue cuando decía tenemos que ver que mirar a los que vamos a lograr. [With the first meetings, I would say to myself, "What did I get myself into?" I did not feel I could be a part of this group. I felt somewhat confused, and at the same time, I did not have a lot of confidence in being able to participate, understand, and be able to do something. With the passing of time, what we were searching for began to take shape. And that was when we had to look at what we could achieve.]

The planning process was an unfamiliar one, in a format unlike other organized meetings, even for school and university members. Both Maria and Luisa initially had difficulty understanding the DN goals and process. For Luisa, understanding of the aims and goals of the process came slowly.

Primero yo estaba bien confundida. No entendía. Me decía, "¿Qué son las metas? ¿Qué es lo que vamos a hacer?" Yo voy a las juntas de que se trata. Hasta que empezamos a tener grupos el entrenamieto por 3 días cuando vino esta Cori [Mantle-Bromley] y empezamos hacer grupitos entonces ya empecé a despejar mi mente. Porque primero estaba bien cerrrada. Bueno no fue como otras juntas que ya habíamos asistido. . . . Yo me decía "¿qué vamos a conseguir? ¿de qué se trata?" Empezamos a hacer los grupos y escribir metas entonces más entendí. [At first, I was really confused. I didn't understand. I said to myself, "What are the goals? What is it we're going to do?" I go to the meetings that explain the project. Once we started to have 3-day training meetings, when (facilitator) Cori (Mantle-Bromley) came and we formed a group, I

began to clear my mind. Because at first, it was closed. Well, the meeting wasn't like others we'd attended. . . . I said to myself, "What will this accomplish? What is it about?" We started to form a group and write goals, and I understood better.]

Christina came to find the unique problem-solving process—which included creating scenarios of what could happen and discussing what in those imagined futures might have a negative or positive impact—to be a stimulating form of thinking.

Los escenario en diferentes angulos lo positivo y lo negativo. Teníamos que construir una buena casa. El señor David [Chrislip] nos dió cimientos. A su manera muy entendible. [The scenarios provided a different perspective that focused on the positive and on the disadvantages. It was important to establish a foundation. Mr. David (Chrislip) gave us the cement. His manner was easy to follow.]

At one point, in order to advance the goals of the meetings, the facilitators gave readings to the group. However, reading in English was not possible for Luisa.

Yo no las leía [el libro y lecturas]. El señor, el escritor que vino, muy amable, pero que no leí el libro. No sé inglés, menos de leerlo. [I did not read them (the book and the readings). The man, the writer who came, was very kind, but I did not read the book. I don't speak English, let alone read it.]

But she was encouraged by the others in the group.

Y tienen que ser bueno porque estaban tan animados y yo decía si Cori viene de tan lejos, tiene que ser algo positivo. [I thought that (the DN meetings) had to be positive because I saw

everyone else very enthusiastic and motivated. Moreover, I would say to myself if Cori comes from so far away, these meetings have to be worthwhile.]

To involve the community at a wider level beyond the two schools, and to determine whether the concerns raised by the DN group really reflected the broader community's concerns, a town hall meeting was announced for Guadalupe. Each team member was responsible for outreach to his or her own community. Ads were placed on the radio, promising food and music and child care for all who attended. Tables were set up, with a flag for each table. A British flag meant English was spoken at the table. A Spanish flag meant Spanish was spoken. Some tables had both British and Spanish flags. A team member sat at each table. Nearly a hundred people showed up.

As part of the town hall meeting, the team members asked the gathered community to "Think of a child you care deeply about. Write down your answers to the questions, 'What in school would help that child? Is that child getting that?'" At the tables, each person talked about what he or she had written. Each table's DN team member took notes on the discussion. Then, while the crowd listened to the mariachi music and ate, the DN team members collected the table notes they had been given and presented them later in the evening.

It emerged from the answers the community gave to these questions that the parents from Guadalupe liked their own schools and were happy with them. But they worried about what would happen once children crossed into high school and had to go to the "city" school.

As a consequence of the discussions, the boundaries that divided the community began to be crossed. For example, at a later leadership session, a student

complained that when she went to Righetti, she felt like a second-class citizen. People nodded their heads. "No," she said, "you don't understand! I mean *really*. We do not have cars of our own. So we cannot drive and park in the parking lot and enter through the front doors of the school. We must ride the bus. And the bus drops us off at the *back door*."

The Righetti High School principal, as a result of interacting with school officials, teachers, students, and parents from Guadalupe, took care of the busing issue and made sure that the Guadalupe bus left the students off at the front of the school rather than at the back.

Luisa felt her involvement at Righetti High School was now a much less fearful experience than she had expected:

A mi esto me ayudó para involucrarme más en Righetti. Ya estoy involucrada. Estoy asistiendo representando Guadalupe. Allí (en las juntas del DN) conocí a la directora y sabe como pensamos. Conmigo se ha portado muy bien. Me ha dado un lugar. Es lo importante que los padres se involucren con los maestros. Sin miedo le puedo. No el 100% pero ya no voy a ciegas. [The DN meetings helped me become more involved at Righetti High School. Now I am involved. I was already representing Guadalupe. It was through the DN meetings that I met the principal who is now familiar with our thinking. She has comported herself well with me. She has given me a place. It is important for parents to involve themselves with the teachers. It can be done without fear. While I do not know 100 percent of everything, at least I knew enough that I was not going to Righetti blindly without knowing anyone.]

Maria felt that giving voice to the students had been vital.

Otro punto principal que se hizo notar. Los estudiantes de aquí se sentían fuera de lugar. Pienso es importante preguntarles. No sé si se haya logrado. Muy positivo que la principal de Righetti hizo algo. [Another point that was clarified was that the Guadalupe students felt out of place at Righetti. It was important that we asked them. I don't know if it has been achieved, but it is positive that the Righetti principal did something.]

In 2005, a new principal arrived and ensured that both Luisa and Christina became involved in the parent advisory committees as representatives for the Guadalupe community.

The Guadalupe Union School District administrators and the Cal Poly professors assisted in organizing guest speakers who presented issues of interest to the community. The Director of Family and Youth Services for the Community Action Committee of Santa Barbara County, for example, emphasized that Latino fathers should be involved in the child-rearing process from the beginning. Other speakers discussed opportunities for a college education and the financial aid available to students whose parents could not afford tuition.

The patience exhibited in the DN work by the group of bilinguals and monolinguals who waited to hear the information in a second language demonstrated a deep respect. Most importantly, the DN provided a forum for thinking about how the youths in Guadalupe are educated in the secondary school system and what it is like for them to live in a small rural town. Each member learned about another perspective. Hearing from students helped parents and educators, and hearing parents' comments helped students, K-12 members, and higher education members to empathize with their perspective.

Still, there remains much to do in Guadalupe. All three mothers, Luisa, Christina, and Maria, felt that the partnership ended before everything was accomplished that they had hoped for. Both Maria and Luisa would have wanted to see a recreation center for the young people in Guadalupe. According to Maria,

Pasamos por el proceso de desarrollo pero nos faltó llegar al final. Decimos esto es lo que se logró. Alcanzamos una meta. Buscamos nos enfocamos en los jóvenes. Como hacer mejor en la escuela. Pues allí faltó el punto final. Me gustaría mirar es como un lugar que los muchachos como un gimnasio. Un lugar aquí porque Guadalupe es un pueblo pequeño. No hay diversión. No hay donde gastar nuestros fuerzas. [We went through a development process, but we did not conclude our goals. We did accomplish one goal—we searched for a focus on the youth—how to improve the schools. But the final point was lacking. I would have liked to see a gymnasium. A place right here, because Guadalupe is so small. There is no entertainment or place to expend energy.]

Luisa agreed about the desire for a gym.

De tener un lugar de recreación. Un gimnasio. Tenía años que no había un equipo. Para los niños hay los Boys and Girls club. Para los jovencitos hay tan poco. Algo que se quedaran en el pueblo. [To have a recreation center, a gym. We went for years without equipment. For the young ones, there is a Boys and Girls Club. But for the older ones, there is so little—something to help keep them in town.]

Christina wished for more practical, concrete results, in addition to the important start of communication between groups that had formerly had little contact with one another.

Nos falta mucho para aplicar a nuevos proyectos. No alcanzó el tiempo para concretar mas. Faltó que hubiera una conclusión mas fuerte. Nos hubieramos unidos a trabajar juntos comunidad, un proyecto bien amarrado. Dejandonos mas amarrados. [We lack the application (of what we learned) to new

projects. There wasn't time to achieve anything concrete. We lacked a strong finish. We could have united in working as a community, an anchoring project that would have left us moored.]

Guadalupe's student and parent perspectives had not commonly been heard in the schools, much less in postsecondary institutional committees. Thus, hearing the voices of minority language individuals in a mixed partnership of K-12 public schools, a university, and the funding source (the Institute for Educational Inquiry) was, to say the least, unusual and a crucial first step toward a better community. Everyone, in the end, felt a new sense of responsibility and greater confidence that the changes that were necessary were within their power. It remains to be seen whether the extended network will result in new ways of working together across the myriad differences that exist. Everyone, however, agrees that taking these first steps was vital to future progress.

PUTTING THE DN WORK IN CONTEXT

Ann M. Foster

The DN initiative demonstrates the vitality of bringing people of good will together to share their hopes, dreams, frustrations, and experiences related to education and schooling in their communities. The process continues to generate changes in individuals and communities. The complexity of the interactions and the subtlety of changes in and among individuals and groups illustrate the impact of the initiative. Process, content, and action interplay to create and support these changes. The characteristics of this work align with John Goodlad's view of schools as an ecological system:

Our findings suggest that creating a school that is a good and satisfying place for students, teachers, and parents is an enormously challenging enterprise. . . .

Schools are cultures seeking to maintain a state of equilibrium within that allows them to function in the face of perturbations from without. They are ecosystems within larger ecosystems. The organism that is a school is a system in which individuals interact with one another and with the whole, within an often ill-defined environmental matrix. . . . The "goodness" of a school depends on the quality of the interactions within and with this matrix. In a good school, these interactions are healthy, enabling the school both to conduct its daily business effectively and to cope with exigencies. In a poor school, these interactions are unhealthy.¹

Goodlad goes on to note: "The longstanding model of school reform runs counter to this ecological

perspective."² He also stresses that this traditional model "eschews context."³

As vortices where society's communal needs and individuals' aspirations whirl and intermix, schools are, as Goodlad points out, a complex ecology. The internal ecosystem of a school—while itself complex and changing—is part of a larger and even more complex community ecosystem. This larger surround shapes the conditions that define the school and gives form to the day-to-day regularities and habits of those who spend time in it.

As I have worked with and learned from the DN groups, however, I have noted that most participants report that they had experienced previous school change in the form of tweaking small features with hopes of making significant differences. Schools are often discussed as isolated entities, with change and renewal taking place in the individual school rather than in the larger context in which schools exist. Therefore, most of us have had our views of school change shaped through serial interventions, one attempt after another to bring about better conditions for some part of the school population related to some part of the school's purpose.

As an example, recent national interest in improving reading test scores has resulted in schoolwide—in fact, districtwide—emphasis on reading.⁴ And, while efforts to support this important skill are in earnest, the initial discussions generally begin with "how do we solve this problem?" They seldom begin with a larger reflection on how the focus in achieving better reading test scores affects, fits into, and is influenced by other aspects of the ecology. However, stepping back and

viewing this focus on reading in light of the larger ecology, one begins to uncover the many ways one change affects other parts of the ecology. For example, improved scores may result in a change in a school's status as an unsuccessful school under the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind legislation, which, while good, creates new challenges that must be addressed. There may be other contextual changes: less time for the arts, fewer resources being channeled into other curriculum areas, an increase in tracking, less time for hands-on science exploration, reduced or eliminated recess periods for young children, and so on.

Additionally, a decision to emphasize one segment of the curriculum often has unexpected ripple effects that extend beyond the boundaries of the school. With more time spent on reading practice in school, for example, children's motivation for out-of-school reading could decrease. Conversely, parent involvement with reading could result in a widespread need for more community reading resources such as libraries. Arts programs could move to the private sector, making them available to fewer children. Lower mathematics and science performance could result from the decreased attention to these subjects, and such reduced performance could lead to criticism from parents and state legislators, resulting in reduced enrollment and funding. Specialized schools could emerge. Dropout rates might increase. Special education referrals might increase.

How does this connect with the DN work? In contrast to shortsighted and internally focused school reform movements that address isolated

aspects of schooling, the DN approach to looking at school change is founded on long-term community engagement of people who are concerned about the education of the youths in their community. These stakeholders include people in formal positions of power and influence and those whose voices are not usually heard in community processes but for whom the outcomes have a direct impact.⁵ The group looks at schools in relation to the larger surround or context and from the community and school experiences of each participant. This engagement is different from that which comes as a result of groups' being formally charged with specific goals and actions. By reflecting the real experiences and aspirations of the community, the process uncovers some standing assumptions and raises different questions—questions that relate the schools to the larger community in real and specific ways. Each stakeholder gathering in each setting unfolds differently, emerging from the habits and regularities of the communities. Disparate factors such as factory or plant schedules, harvest seasons, weather, driving distance, child care, school events, university classes, requirements for translation, cultural backgrounds of the diverse members of the community, and compensation for lost work time are among the factors that determine the process and interactions.

I have many memories from observing stakeholder meetings: lively conversation; children running and laughing; door prizes; green chili, enchiladas, and burritos; cold fall air; leaves crunching underfoot; hugs and hellos; rustic log buildings; calm lake views from a window; soft footsteps on deep carpet; meeting materials neatly arranged on tables; flowering university gardens framed by a window; inviting refreshments; warm greetings in several languages; tables being rearranged into a circle; traffic noise from outside competing with stories of the school day; snow beginning to fall. As I observed and participated in the

settings' sessions and interviewed participants, I came to see that each setting and each session had its own tone and rhythm, and at the same time, all had remarkable similarities. People from large urban centers, isolated rural areas, north, east, south, and west brought similar questions, doubts, and hopes into this work. In the process of becoming friends and allies dedicated to improving the quality of education in their communities, participants learned to view their roles in and responsibilities to their communities differently. Despite their vast apparent differences, individuals came together with strong commitment to their communities and their children. And their commitment sustained groups through leadership transitions, differences of opinion, impatience to get things done, and in some cases, false starts and regrouping. The nature of the interactions took into account the larger ecology of which the school is a vital part.

Reflection on what transpired at the sessions provides insights into how this work connected members of the school community to each other and connected the school to the larger community. Each individual brought into the process the behavioral norms embedded in his or her day-to-day interactions and personal sense of place and belonging. People with positional power sat at the figurative round table with people who had never attended a community meeting. Others at the table knew the community leaders only from afar and often saw themselves as distanced from the individuals who, they articulated, deserved respect and had more to contribute because of their positions and power. People in positions of influence and power most often welcomed the opportunity to interact with fellow community members and learn from them—a level of ease with others and public discourse that accompanies life in the public eye. Establishing equitable relationships among the members of such groups provided a major challenge for the DN initiative.

The DN work—convening groups so that the individuals involved speak with heart and knowledge about their perceptions of the community—resulted in collective change but began with individual journeys of engagement. Community members' descriptions of their range of feelings as the process unfolded support the concept of ecological change. Comments accompanied by smiles and laughter about learning to call the mayor, the school principal, or one's pastor by his or her first name; reflections on the sense of awe felt by some regarding the opportunity to be in the room with people who had many years of education, titles, and responsibility for large systems; and the self-deprecating comments by these individuals about what they could possibly contribute to these sessions were common in my interviews with community participants.

People in leadership roles, such as city and school officials and church and community center leaders, were among those who welcomed different points of view in this nonpolitical environment. They frequently engaged in debate and, in the early stages of the work, put forth ideas and plans to address issues. They did not speak with the same sense of awe about addressing and being addressed by first names; rather, the interaction was natural and a practiced part of their everyday lives. However, as the initiative progressed, many of these public officials reflected with smiles that they had to change their thinking about process and solutions. Many came to meetings with an action orientation and a take-charge attitude. They were accustomed to making decisions on their own, confident that they had the needed information and infrastructure to take action and the sense of positional accountability to move things along. During interviews, many of these thoughtful and dedicated leaders indicated that they learned to listen, to set aside their preconceived ideas about getting quickly to a solution, and to trust others' experiences. They reported changes in

perceptions regarding not only individual and collective responsibility for education in the community but also the ability to make a difference. Changes in understanding regarding individuals' growth and learning emerged differently depending on perceptions of place and power, one's relationship to the community, and the community itself.

This description frames the process, content, and action that make up the DN work, as well as the confluence of the three. Each team had a unique journey formed by the original leaders' perception of the process, influenced by geography, and shaped by the community culture and, ultimately, by the team members themselves. Still, when the groups were brought together in June 2005, it was evident that there was a strong common bond among them. While the sequence of activities included unexpected detours and remarkable progress in patterns uniquely woven by the local context, the commonality of results—changes in the community, in educational systems, in the mindsets of individuals, and in the traction gained to take individual and collective responsibility for improving factors that affect education—transcend the individual settings.

Process, content, and action—all necessary to the DN work—intertwine and compete for individual attention. As a result, the sequence of the work was nonlinear. Throughout the years of sessions, participants commented on the power of the process, how the careful attention to building relationships resulted in candid conversations, thoughtful articulation of issues, and creative solutions for addressing problems. However, in reflecting on the process, participants also noted that momentum was established when they used the content learned and practiced, applied the scenarios, reached out to the larger community, and folded in new information as they grappled with issues. As several participants noted,

the process in many ways *was* the content and the action. Yet, when changes occurred—new initiatives were developed, new structures established, and new opportunities created—the participants noted that the momentum from these tangible results propelled them to continue the process. One participant commented that the substantial outcome of the work was a change in attitudes—individual and community—that created a sense of responsibility and motivation to get involved, to involve others, and to take charge of community improvement. This illustrates the complex interaction among the processes, content, and actions. Building relationships and trust, teaching content, developing an action plan, and carrying out the plan all needed to be included in the leadership sessions conducted in the DN settings, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes in a building-block manner, and sometimes in a cyclical pattern. Moving forward and spending time nurturing relationships or rebuilding them competed for time. And perhaps more fundamentally, in many ways they were not separable. People's motivation to move forward, contribute more time, and engage in community outreach was directly reflected in their sense of belonging to both the group and the community. In fact, it was noted by many participants that this process made them feel that they were part of a larger group—the community—for the first time.

The complex interplay of process and product and of action and result in this model of community engagement help define the work. To further explore this understanding, an observation by a community participant on the name of the initiative follows. The participant, a bilingual English/Spanish speaker, noted that sustainability is related to ongoing work—meeting, developing new leaders, acting on action plans—and that the initiative itself states that by using the word “developing” in its title. Using “ing” implies that the effort is ongoing and changing as new people

get involved. This grounding of the work in the language was helpful with our understanding of the process/content/action relationship. As we develop networks, the development itself implies a confluence—an interdependence—of the three. It also reinforces the developmental nature of all three.

As an example, members of one group carefully attended to process, developing good communication and shared purposes as they created a town meeting to engage others. The group's content development helped members plan and deliver a quality session of conversation and the sharing of hopes and visions for the community's school. The town meeting resulted in some concrete suggestions, many of which were directed toward the school system. The district took the suggestions to heart and began working on some, and there was change. However, the town meeting became a summative event, and the activity of the group began to lag. Fortunately, at this point, IEI staff members conducted follow-up visits, and local participants renewed their commitment to the work. This resurgence of energy offered hope that the work could be sustained. As participants resumed their conversations, they focused on the impact of their work and recognized that their commitment to community development had not dwindled. They reconstituted the group and renewed its efforts.

This example illustrates the integral relationship of the components. The process (developing leadership relationships), the content (skill and confidence development), and the activity (community and school renewal) seemed to come full circle. When group members reflected on this, they realized that community investment in the school (school renewal) is an ongoing way of doing things and that the community itself had to take action—not just suggest action for others to take.

A stream is integral to a meadow's ecology: the stream's health affects and is affected by the health of the meadow. Similarly, the health of a school is integral to a community's ecology. And, of course, both examples are part of an even larger set of ecological relationships. Renewing any one part of a system without considering the effect on other parts is likely to result in short-lived changes or decisions that produce only minor improvements.

Another way to look at the DN initiative in contrast to more familiar school reform initiatives is that this work engages people in studying their environment, examining what and who is served by the current state of the community, and deciding how they would like it to be and what they must do to create that future. By envisioning what could be and taking steps to create it, the DN work builds a community that sees to its own health rather than depending on others to mend problem areas. The DN work has the potential to

renew schooling by creating a community norm of engagement, inquiry, and looking beyond the usual voices and usual solutions.

Finally, this initiative is iterative; process, content, and action become cyclic. All systems are in constant motion, and schools and communities are no exceptions. Processes that work in concert with ongoing change that is a natural part of any system are resilient. They provide a way for members to reflect on the health and well-being of the community's schools. The way the community—including the school—thinks about change becomes an ongoing process of self-renewal. This moves change from isolated efforts to broader processes that reflect the community at large. And the ongoing nature of community engagement requires that new processes emerge, new input be sought, and actions be taken from a rich, deep content base reflecting the voices of the community. The outcomes of these processes are

neither predictable nor prescribed; they come instead from thoughtful processes to collect the words, ideas, needs, and hopes of the real community members.

NOTES

1. Goodlad, John I. *Educational Renewal: Better Teachers, Better Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), p. 218.
2. Goodlad, *Educational Renewal*, p. 19.
3. Goodlad, *Educational Renewal*, p. 219.
4. Dillon, Sam. "Schools Cut Back Subjects to Push Reading and Math," *New York Times*, 26 March 2006, pp. 1, 16.
5. Chrislip, David D. *The Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), p. 74.

SUSTAINING COLLABORATIVE ENGAGEMENT

Richard W. Clark

With our community coming together – the people in the community, the schools, and the university – and building on the Agenda for Education in a Democracy, we can overcome the problems in our community and educate all our youths. That’s what this initiative is about – working together to educate all of America’s youths.

*Emory Hagins
Community Member
Portal, Georgia*

As Carol Wilson noted in the introduction, each of the stories in this publication provides a very personal look into the challenges and opportunities associated with efforts to build capacity for collaborative engagement. Here we report on a less personal but still important issue: sustaining the work.

In January 2006, the Institute for Educational Inquiry convened educators and community members from the ten sites of the Developing Networks of Responsibility to Educate America’s Youths (DN) initiative. These individuals joined with the codirectors and evaluator of DN to share approaches being taken for sustaining the work in the sites and to develop recommendations for those engaged in similar work.

We are all familiar with well-intentioned initiatives that were launched with much fanfare, celebrated early success, and then disappeared, forgotten, as some new venture appeared on the scene. Such early demise of good efforts conflicts with the frequently repeated mantra that real progress takes time. Sustaining an initiative for a long time is particularly important if it is to contribute to the never-ending process of renewing schooling. Unfortunately, the “cure-of-

the-day” is dominant among efforts to strengthen schooling, and such cures tend to have very short life spans.

Participants in the discussion regarding sustainability of collaborative initiatives agreed on several reasons why it is hard to keep this work moving ahead and identified six keys to overcoming these difficulties.

WHY IS IT DIFFICULT TO SUSTAIN SUCH INITIATIVES?

There appear to be four primary reasons for difficulty in sustaining such work.

1. Confusion exists regarding the purpose of the initiative.

- Such confusion is frequently related to a failure by the group to come to agreement around a set of core values and purposes.
- A particular problem exists for an initiative such as DN that is intended as a capacity-building initiative. Some who become involved may see it instead as designed to complete a particular project (change an English Language

Learners program, prepare a catalog of services available to a community, increase test scores for students, etc.). In such instances, when the individual project is completed, participants see no reason to continue to work together.

2. Key individuals and groups disappear or lose interest.

- Individuals who initiate the work or who are part of the early training and development efforts lose interest, are diverted to other work, retire, move, or otherwise disappear.
- Some early recruits never quite see the connection between their interests and the initiative and never make a full commitment to the work. For example, a university-based person may not see the benefit of this work to his or her primary research interest, or community members may find that the work detracts from their primary employment responsibilities.

- An individual may come to the work because of his or her position (a United Way staff member, a principal, a university department head) and leave because of a change in that position, only to be replaced by someone who does not share the original participant's interest in the work.

3. Needed resources are not available.

- There is no money to support continuation of meetings—no money for space, food, or facilitator help.
- Participants' expertise is another valuable resource. As individuals withdraw from the work, this resource is lost.

4. External support is lost.

- External support, such as that from the Institute for Educational Inquiry for the DN initiative, tends to disappear following early stages of such work. Loss of the technical support and other assistance provided by such a source is particularly critical if sufficient leadership depth has not been developed and a process for continuing to nurture it is not present.
- To some extent, participants in initiatives such as DN are accountable to external funders and support agencies. This sense of accountability can be lost with the loss of contact with the external agency.
- Support from sponsors such as universities, school districts, community governments, church councils, or human

services agencies are a special form of external support that, if lost, can contribute to the demise of an initiative.

WHAT ARE THE KEYS TO SUSTAINING AN INITIATIVE?

Participants identified six requirements for overcoming the preceding obstacles and sustaining an initiative.

1. Participants must be clear on the moral grounding for the work and use it to focus their work.

- Being clear on the moral grounding requires substantial study, reflection, and dialogue among participants. It cannot be imposed on a group.
- Commitment to a common set of core values or purposes should emerge from deliberations by members of the group. They need to be clear regarding their mission.
- Agreeing on common purposes requires participants to understand their different cultural backgrounds and yet treat each other as individuals rather than as stereotypical representatives of a culture.

2. Sustaining strong leadership is a key ingredient.

- Leadership is a multidimensional notion involving people in a variety of roles. People in traditional power positions—such as superintendents, school board members, mayors, city council members, deans, and university presidents and regents—need to be supportive of the work.

- Those who are initially committed in leadership roles must take responsibility for nurturing new people in leadership roles and helping them keep focused on the overarching goals of the group. As the leadership of the engaged group changes, there also needs to be a continuing commitment of tripartite (community, school, and university) members of the group through ongoing participation in face-to-face meetings.

- The group needs to provide for ongoing development of the leadership understandings and skills required for this collaborative work.
- The presence of a “chief worrier” who is skilled as a collaborative leader is a must.

3. Teams of knowledgeable and committed individuals willing and able to engage energetically are vital to the continuing success of any such endeavor.

- Processes need to be in place to continually invite more stakeholders and build more social capital.
- The people engaged in the work need to include those whose voices are not commonly heard as well as those who are more often engaged in such enterprises.
- The initiative needs to help ensure that participants possess the skills and understandings necessary to analyze situations, to collaborate with each other, and to engage others in the work. This can be done through a combination of recruiting people to the group

and providing those involved with continuing opportunities to learn.

- Strong, multiple means of communications must be employed.
- Current students should be engaged in the work because they provide an important perspective on present conditions and because such experiences can help them grow as future participants in democratic processes.

4. For the work to be sustained, reliable resources must be identified.

- Money is essential but is not the only resource that must be plentiful. In-kind contributions are also important.

5. Critical friends need to be cultivated.

- Groups need the assistance of “outsiders” who are sufficiently knowledgeable of their work to raise challenging questions and suggest alternatives to the ideas generated by the group.

6. Accomplishments must be identified clearly and celebrated.

- No endeavor is likely to last for long if it fails to evaluate and document its accomplishments and celebrate them in a public way so that not only direct participants but observers recognize that there are results from the work.
- In order to identify accomplishments, an effective system of tracking and communicating information about the work of the group is necessary. What are the purposes of the group? Who is involved? What have they done? What have been the outcomes of the work – intended and unintended?

CONTRIBUTORS

Mona H. Bailey has been involved in the work of the Institute for Educational Inquiry since retiring as a public school administrator, and she served as one of the three codirectors for the Developing Networks of Responsibility to Educate America's Youths (DN) initiative. Prior to working on the DN initiative, she codirected the IEI's three-year Diversity in Teaching and Teacher Education initiative and authored a chapter, "Access to Knowledge," in the book *Leadership for Educational Renewal*. Her involvement with the IEI began when she participated in cohort II of the year-long Leadership Program. A public school educator and administrator for thirty-two years, she served in the Seattle School District as a science teacher, counselor, middle school principal, assistant superintendent, and deputy superintendent. During her public school tenure, she also served twelve years as the assistant superintendent for public instruction for the state of Washington. She recently served two years as the head of Forest Ridge School of the Sacred Heart, a Catholic and independent all-girls 5-12 school in Bellevue, Washington.

Jerry Bergstrom has worked in public schools in Nebraska for thirty-one years. He began his career as a school counselor serving rural K-12 students for fourteen years. For the past nineteen years, he has worked in a growing, diverse district in Lexington, Nebraska. During his tenure with the Lexington Public Schools, he has served as a junior high guidance counselor, director of special services, and for the past eighteen years, principal in a K-5 building. He is active in community service organizations, serving on the United Way Board, the Boys and Girls Club Board, the Optimist Club, and on the Outreach Board of Grace Lutheran Church. Bergstrom has made presentations at regional, state, and

national conferences on his school community's work with the IEI and the Developing Networks of Responsibility to Educate America's Youths initiative.

Richard W. Clark is executive vice president of the Institute for Educational Inquiry in Seattle, where he works with educators, journalists, and policymakers. He is an educational consultant and author who has been a classroom teacher, high school principal, and deputy superintendent. Clark has taught in four universities and is currently an auxiliary faculty member at the University of Washington, Bothell. He has authored or coauthored fourteen books and written numerous chapters, monographs, and articles.

Gregg Crocker is director of Community Service Education in Wheeling (Illinois) School District 21. He received his bachelor's degree from Quincy University in Quincy, Illinois, and a master's degree in administration from Northern Illinois University. He taught sixth grade for four years in District 21 and then spent two years as the assistant director of staff development. Following his staff development role, he was a middle school principal and then an elementary school principal for twenty-eight years for District 21. While he was a principal, Crocker was the recipient of the "Those Who Excel" award from Illinois State Board of Education and the "Shining Star" award from the Village of Mt. Prospect, Illinois. Upon his retirement, he was hired as a consultant in his current community service position.

Ann M. Foster is executive director of the National Network for Educational Renewal, a senior associate with the

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John I. Goodlad is president of the Institute for Educational Inquiry in Seattle. He has held professorships at Emory University, the University of Chicago, the University of California at Los Angeles (where he served as dean of the Graduate School of Education from 1967 to 1983), and the University of Washington. He has authored, coauthored, or edited over three dozen books, has written chapters and papers for more than one hundred other books and yearbooks, and has had more than two hundred articles published in professional journals and encyclopedias. His research and contributions to public education have been recognized with twenty honorary degrees from universities in Canada and the United States. His major current interest is in advancing the public purpose of education in the American democracy.

Anita Hernandez is associate professor in the College of Education at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. She teaches the reading and language arts methods and bilingual literacy course for future teachers and the research methods course for graduate students. Additionally, she is a project director for a federal professional development grant for teachers of second language learners. Hernandez is a former classroom teacher and coordinated a college migrant education program for six years.

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Noreen Hosier has worked for over three decades in the New York City Public School System in a variety of classroom and supervisory positions at several levels: elementary, middle school, district office, and higher education. Currently, she is a distinguished lecturer in the Education Department of Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York. She

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Karen Daly Klein is a Nationally Board Certified teacher who has taught middle school for nine years in Wheeling (Illinois) School District 21 and for one year at Metcalf Laboratory School on Illinois State University's campus. She earned her first master's degree in curriculum and instruction from Illinois State University. In 2002, she became a district-level Reading Instructional Specialist, where she supported elementary schools through cognitive coaching and staff development for three years. She earned a second master's degree in 2004 in educational administration from the University of Illinois. Klein is currently on maternity leave from District 21.

Rosario Olave was born and raised in La Paz, Bolivia. After earning a degree in social work in Bolivia, Rosario was a social worker there for five years. She moved to the United States in 1985 and has been a social worker here for the last twenty years. She is currently the Community Parent Involvement Coordinator for the Early Childhood Developmental Enrichment Center in Wheeling (Illinois) School District 21. She helps coordinate the learning experiences for hundreds of pre-kindergarten children as well as weekly support meetings for preschool parents.

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JoNancy Warren has been in the education field for the past thirty-four years. She was a classroom teacher for eighteen years, and for the past thirteen years she has helped develop, implement, and direct Illinois State University's first professional development school, partnering with Wheeling School District 21. She is now working with Illinois State University as the director of professional development schools, helping to develop and expand PDS sites in the state and focusing on intern and mentor development. She is involved with the National Network for Educational Renewal, serving on both the Tripartite Council and the Governing Council and overseeing a community grant that has a focus of fostering the success of minority students. She is the coauthor of "School-University Partnership: A Shared Journey," a chapter in *Transforming Teacher Education through Partnerships*.

Carol A. Wilson has worked in education for thirty-four years as a teacher, high school principal, assistant superintendent, university instructor, consultant, and nonprofit executive director. For seventeen years, she served as executive director of the Colorado Partnership for Educational Renewal, a collaborative initiative that included sixteen school districts (with more than six hundred schools), eight universities and colleges, and the Colorado Community Colleges system. She co-chaired the governor's

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INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL INQUIRY

The Institute for Educational Inquiry (IEI) was founded by John I. Goodlad in Seattle in 1992 as a 501(c)(3) independent, nonprofit corporation with conceptual and administrative links to the Center for Educational Renewal (CER) at the University of Washington. It is funded by the generous support of many philanthropic foundations and individuals.

The Institute works with the CER and the National Network for Educational Renewal (NNER) to advance the Agenda for Education in a Democracy that consists of a four-part mission, a set of strategies, and conditions that are necessary to carry out the strategies. It seeks to

1. Foster in the nation's young the skills, dispositions, and knowledge necessary for effective

participation in a social and political democracy.

2. Ensure that all youths have access to those understandings and skills required for satisfying and responsible lives regardless of race, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or birth language.
3. Develop and provide continuing support to educators who nurture the learning and well-being of every student.
4. Ensure educators' competence and commitment to serving as stewards of their schools.

To carry out this mission, the IEI seeks the simultaneous renewal of schools and the education of educators.

It works to develop a broad base of well-educated leaders, emphasizing reflective practice and inquiry and stressing the value of educators' learning from each other and from those who share their commitment to the education of the nation's young. The professional development initiatives of the IEI are diverse, including long-term programs to expand diversity in teaching and teacher education programs; to integrate the arts into the preparation of all elementary classroom teachers; to develop leadership skills of faculty within schools, colleges of education, and the arts and sciences; to involve the community more closely in teacher education and schooling; and to establish greater understanding between journalists and educators.

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