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Andrea Dyrness

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Andrea Dyrness : Mothers United: An Immigrant Struggle for Socially Just Education before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Mothers United: An Immigrant Struggle for Socially Just Education:

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful. thoughts from a practicing teacherBy theteachAs a practicing teacher, I found Andrea Dyrness's book to be a thoughtful articulation of what often challenges schools: how can various stakeholders find common ground and create meaningful change? As both a teacher and a parent, I know that

schools can be as exclusionary as they can be welcoming to parents and other adult caretakers. So, Dyrness's book offers a cautionary to even the most well-meaning of caring professionals. But this story is ultimately not Andrea's, and is instead the story of how a group of mothers come to see themselves as powerful change agents despite their marginalized status as women, as mothers, as immigrants, and as speakers of a language other than the dominant language of this country. Dyrness positions readers at the kitchen table where the mothers met in weekly sessions, so we can see how political action is created and sustained but also how personal transformation becomes possible once one makes the choice to act. These women share their stories about their lives and their work with the school community first with Dyrness and later with academics, other professionals, and other parents. It is clear that this story is their story, and it resonates with this reader because the author has foregrounded her subjects as resourceful, powerful women who worked for community change and the betterment of their children's lives and by doing so reaped the benefit of changing themselves in ways they could never have imagined. This is an important book for educators, for women, for those who are interested in ethnography and anthropology as well as those who are interested in change movements especially at the local level.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. really glad I did
By Chris Dakin
HAD to buy it for a class, really glad I did. I looked at the research aspect of it the first time I read it, and focused on the school itself the second time. Nicely put together work.

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Expanding reform
By Kristina
Mothers United is a great ethnographic account of the myriad of issues that arise in a school and community reform effort. Dyrness begins the ethnography with a concise summary of the main issues of the study. She then unravels the complex historical, social, cultural and political landscape of Oakland that gave the container for this type of study. As she narrows to focus on Madres Unidas, Dyrness titles a section "Enter the Ethnographer" (p. 18). This section stabilizes her voice as the researcher, and crystallizes her position for reference throughout the rest of the book. As she embarks upon the complex endeavor of conducting an ethnography with Latina mothers, documenting their everyday work and struggle within a multifaceted reform agenda, Dyrness does an excellent job articulating her positionality. Through the study, "progressive" professional educators attempted to include parents in the reform efforts through levels of participation sanctioned by the institution of schooling and limiting in many ways for the parents. These models, although presented with good intentions, were steeped in deficit frames. Teachers saw parents as lacking the skills necessary to be viable partners. In addition to the usually noted barriers of "lack of English literacy, low socioeconomic status, unfamiliarity with the U.S. educational system, and patchy educational backgrounds," (p. 2) the heart of the issue of participation for teachers was the view they had of parent involvement. The educators left little room for parents to reinvent themselves in the space of the partnership, imposing oppressive controlling images of Latina mothers (Chapter 4) and re-inscribing these images on the mothers. While the mothers were the voice and the face of the small school reform, they were both celebrated as public figures and vulnerable to the compartmentalization and control of their participation by more powerful actors in the reform effort. Controlling images played out in the public sphere that redefined and domesticated their roles, highlighting the importance of the private sphere of Ofelia's kitchen (Chapter 5), where they carried out their research, deconstructed these images and recast their roles as political agents in a struggle. I highly recommend this ethnography as a component to any community-based education reform reading. As a written piece, it illuminates the complex terrain and multiple and often competing goals of school reform. In structure it adheres to a feminist promise, to center the study on Latina mothers (women of color), in a kitchen (domestic space) and to document their day-to-day lives wherein they link the personal to the political. Lastly, this ethnography emphasizes the importance of theorizing coalition building. With the deeply rooted deficit model conditioned in even "progressive" professional educators, administrators, parents and other actors in a school reform effort, how can a deep honoring of difference occur that allows for equitable levels of participation in mobilizing for change? If a central problem of engaging parents in reform efforts hinges on re-imagining the controlling images that bind them to determined scripts, what learning needs to occur for all involved to transform these images and how can that happen in both the private and public sectors with the goal of real change?

In urban American school systems, the children of recent immigrants and low-income parents of color disproportionately suffer from overcrowded classrooms, lack of access to educational resources, and underqualified teachers. The challenges posed by these problems demand creative solutions that must often begin with parental intervention. But how can parents without college educations, American citizenship, English literacy skills, or economic stability organize to initiate change on behalf of their children and their community?

"Andrea Dyrness has produced an intimate, persuasive ethnography of a new, unexpected learning site beyond the school walls. In *Mothers United*, we see the deft, sensitive hand of a genuinely collaborative ethnographer working as a democratic, cultural broker/teacher/learner. I haven't seen a better portrayal of activist ethnographic practice in the literature." Douglas Foley, University of Texas, Austin