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NEGOTIATING SOCIAL DIFFERENCES
Youths' Assessments of Educators' Strategies

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Many have described the opposition youths from stigmatized social groups may develop toward school. This study focuses alternatively on interactional, peda- gogical, and curricular actions that stigmatized high school students perceive as affecting their willingness to adapt to varied classrooms. Interview, observation, and record data from 49 students illustrate that stigmatized youths prefer teachers who give personal attention to students, who convey respect for and confidence in students who are socially different from themselves, and who support and elicit student voice and input. Youths also express strong distaste for lecturing and seat- work and prefer personally relevant curriculum.

It's like once they [teachers] see a Mexican right away [they have expectations] you know, especially when they're dressed like this [like me]. . . . Sometimes when I wear my Pendletons[1] or I wear a lot of eyeliner or something, you know, we look scary looking some- times. I guess that's the way teachers are, you know. The first im- pression always has a lot to say about a person. But, they should al- ways look at what a person has. They have to talk to that person, get to know that person.

—Sonia Gonzales, Mexican American high school student

Sonia speaks of stigmatized differences between individuals that inhibit successful interaction. She experiences specifically stigma associated with sociocultural and socioeconomic differ- ences in self-presentation. In her view, these work to separate

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teachers of European American descent from herself. In short, they create a social "border."

In previous work, my colleagues and I have identified a number of social differences that can function as "borders" separating teacher from student, including variations in sociocultural, socio-economic, linguistic, and gender status among others (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1993, 1998). Borders arise particularly when the knowledge, skills, and behaviors in one world are more highly valued and rewarded than those in another; in short, they are features of social difference that are not politically neutral (Erickson, 1987). Social differences do not themselves necessarily preclude successful interaction, however, people do develop vested interests in being and acting differently from one another in response to their relative positions in the social order or in order to maximize their economic and political security (Barth, 1969; McDermott & Gospidonoff, 1979). This has led some to argue that children from social groups that typically perform less well in school do so largely in reaction to stigmatized social differences. When educators develop strategies that lessen or minimize the impact of stigmatized social differences, these scholars argue, children will trust the teacher and then assent to learn (Davidson, 1996; Erickson, 1987; Phelan et al., 1998).

But how can educators lessen or minimize the impact of social differences? Although many scholars offer ideas about this issue,[2] this article describes behaviors and practices that adolescents facing borders themselves identify as effective for communicating across the social divisions between themselves and educators. Specifically, the article describes interactional, curricular, and pedagogical actions that students facing borders perceive as affecting their reactions to teachers as well as their willingness and ability to adapt to classroom settings. The article also includes a brief case study. This illustrates in a more concrete manner how one high school teacher uses various strategies students identify to effectively negotiate borders between students and herself.

DATA SOURCES, CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK,
AND ANALYTICAL METHODS

The data presented are drawn from the Students' Multiple Worlds Study, a 2-year longitudinal investigation of adolescents' perspectives about factors that affect their engagement with school (Phelan et al., 1993, 1998). The study includes students from four large urban California high schools selected to represent some of the sociocultural, socioeconomic, linguistic, and academic diversity found in many schools today. The study team came to know these students by spending time with them at school, engaging them in four in-depth interviews, reviewing their school record files (grades, test scores, attendance, and disciplinary data), and by interviewing teachers and administrators with whom they had contact.

Over the course of the study, the research team developed the Students' Multiple Worlds Model (see Figure 1) to depict the relationships among students' most immediate sociocultural "worlds"—those of the family, peer group, and school (Phelan et al., 1993, 1998). The model represents the idea that students who function in schools must transition between varied worlds daily. The term *world* is meant to convey the idea that cultural knowledge, values, expectations, and behaviors among other things are found within the boundaries of students' families, peer groups, and schools. A constellation of factors, including language, socioeconomic status, and culture of origin, among others, combine to shape these worlds. Students may move between their worlds with ease or with varying degrees of difficulty. When differences between worlds are stigmatized, borders that impede transitions among worlds may result.

This analysis focuses on data from 49 adolescents. The group includes 16 European American students, 15 students of Latino descent, 8 students of Vietnamese descent, 5 African American students, 3 multiethnic students, 2 students of Filipino descent, and 1 Japanese American. In all, 35 of the 49 students describe social borders between their academic (school) and social (family, community or peer) worlds. Students facing social borders include the following three types:[3]
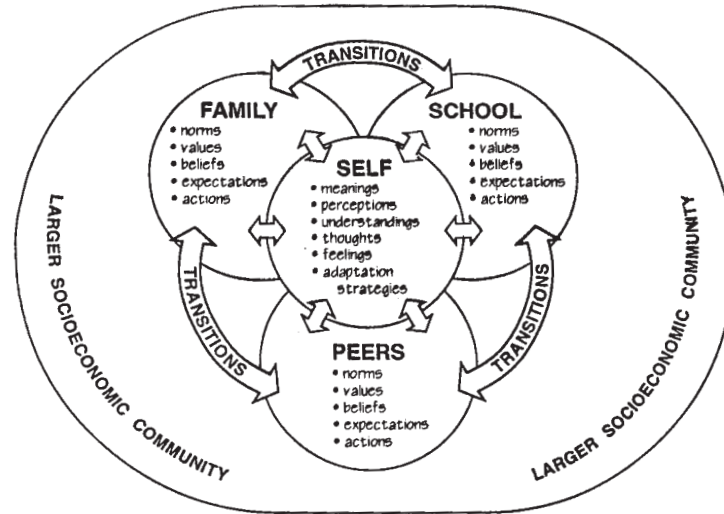
FIGURE 1:   The Students' Multiple Worlds Model

Different Worlds/Border Crossings Managed (*n* = 14): For these students, stigmatized differences among family, peer, and/or school worlds require them to adjust and reorient as movement across contexts occurs. However, students in this category use strategies that enable them to manage crossings successfully, adapting to things valued in each setting. They are often academically high achieving.

Different Worlds/Border Crossings Difficult (*n* = 14): In this category, like the former, students describe stigmatized differences among their family, peer, and/or school worlds. However, these students find transitions more difficult. Common to this type are students who adapt in some circumstances but not in others; that is, they may do well in one or two classes and less well in the rest.

Different Worlds/Border Crossings Resisted (*n* = 7): Students of this type perceive borders between their worlds as insurmountable. They actively or passively resist transitions. Academically low-achieving students are typical of this type, but high-achieving students who do not connect with peers or family may also exhibit such patterns.

Students who do not face social borders (*n* = 14) include students who describe values, beliefs, expectations, and normative ways of behaving as similar across their worlds (*n* = 11) and students who describe their worlds as different but make transitions among them

relatively effortlessly ($n = 3$). (The latter students experience social differences but do not experience significant stigma due to such.)

To identify practices and behaviors that students perceive as affecting their willingness and ability to adapt to classroom settings, this study draws from a variety of sources. The principal source of information is an extended interview during which the 49 students select and describe their favorite and least favorite classrooms. During this interview, students assign a numeric rating to each class and then explain why they selected the class and rated it in a particular way. Following this, interviewers ask students to describe in detail what they see as engaging or nonengaging about the subject, the teacher, the teacher's pedagogical style, and classroom work arrangements. Additional sources of data provide information about how some of these students respond to various classroom elements and teacher behaviors. These data sources include teacher interviews about individual students and their behavior, students' academic and attendance record data, and field observations of students in a variety of classroom settings.

Data analysis proceeded as follows. First, after initially reading the data, I developed a set of broad categories that were eventually used to group students' responses. These broad categories include teachers' interactional styles, teachers' pedagogical styles, characteristics of the written curriculum, and social aspects of the classroom atmosphere. Second, and again based on notes taken during an initial reading of the data, I identified thematic subcategories for each of these areas. (So, for example, students often describe their preference for teachers who personally communicate interest in their personal well-being and futures. Under the general category of interaction, I developed a subcategory called teachers' relational style and then an additional subcategory called personal interest in students to capture these descriptions; see Table 2.) I then placed each student's rationale or rationales for the selection of a given class as a favorite or least favorite in the appropriate categories. Note that categories are not mutually exclusive. Rather, when students identify more than one category as relevant, their responses are placed in both. So, for example, if a student rates a class as his or her favorite because the teacher takes a personal interest in the student

TABLE 1
Students' Perceptions of General Factors
That Affect Their Feelings About Classes

Factor Identified	Students Who Face Social Borders (n = 35)		Students Who Do Not Face Social Borders (n = 14)	
	%	n	%	n
Teachers' interaction patterns	91.4	32	71.4	10
Teachers' pedagogy	65.7	23	85.7	12
Characteristics of the written curriculum	74.3	26	92.9	13
Social aspects of the class	14.3	5	7.1	1

and because the student likes the books the teacher uses, that student's responses are placed in two response categories.

ENGAGING AND DISENGAGING CLASSROOM PRACTICES: STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

In this portion of the article, I describe factors that students facing borders say affect their reactions to different classes as well as their willingness or ability to adapt to classroom norms and expectations. As indicated in Table 1, the data indicate that students facing borders concentrate foremost on interactional factors when assessing classes and they focus on these relatively more often than their peers who do not face social borders.[4] (For a detailed description of how these tables emerged and how they should be interpreted, see Note 4.)

Students facing borders often identify pedagogical and curricular concerns as well. In the sections that follow, I discuss commonly mentioned concerns in each of these broad categories.

INTERACTIONAL FACTORS

Students facing borders indicate that teachers' interactional styles powerfully influence their reactions to varied classes. But just what interaction patterns do students facing borders attend to?

TABLE 2
Students' Perceptions of Teacher Interaction Patterns
That Affect Their Engagement

Factor Identified	Students Who Face Social Borders (n = 35)		Students Who Do Not Face Social Borders (n = 14)	
	%	n	%	n
Teachers' relational styles	48.6	17	35.7	5
Personal attention in students				
is engaging	37.1	13	28.6	4
Emotional distance, uncaring behavior				
is disengaging	11.4	4	7.1	1
Irritable, mean is disengaging	5.7	2	7.1	1
Teachers' authority patterns	51.4	18	42.9	6
Relaxed, informal, not authoritarian				
is engaging	31.4	11	35.7	5
Teacher able to maintain social control				
is engaging	17.1	6	—	0
Authoritarian is disengaging	25.7	9	7.1	1
Teachers' expectations	28.6	10	14.3	2
Respect conveyed for social group				
and/or individual capabilities				
is engaging	22.9	8	14.3	2
Negative expectations for social				
group and/or self is disengaging	11.4	4	—	0

As indicated in Table 2, these students especially appreciate teachers who develop more personalized relationships with students. Like their peers who do not face social borders, they say that highly authoritarian teachers are not engaging. And they criticize teachers who convey pejorative attitudes toward social differences.

Relational Style: The Importance
of Personalization

A recurring and frequent theme in students' descriptions of their preferences is desire for personal attention from classroom teachers. Of course, all students want to be acknowledged as worthwhile individuals. However, a substantial portion of students emphasize also that they want teachers to personally and consistently

communicate interest in their personal well-beings and futures. Students who face borders, and especially those who describe difficult transitions between home and school (Types III and IV), speak particularly frequently and ardently about the importance of forming meaningful relationships with adults. Roughly 49% (17 of 35) describe this as critical to their reactions to a given class.

Teachers communicate interest in students' personal well-being in two primary ways. First, in some instances teachers learn something about students' personal concerns and interests and engage students in discussions about their lives generally. For example, at one high school students from socioeconomically and ethnically isolated neighborhoods who enter high school with a C average or better are enrolled in an accelerated support program designed to prepare them for college entry. The teacher in this program not only works with students in school but also establishes relationships when possible with the students' families. In other instances, students describe classroom teachers who notice, listen, and show concern when students experience pressing problems. Numerous students describe the importance of teachers who are willing to take time to discuss and offer advice about concerns that weigh heavily—a friend's death, a fight with a parent, a conflict with peers or a boyfriend. Students speaking in this vein also note the importance of teachers who make some allowances to accommodate the emotional demands associated with extreme personal pressures and problems.

A second way that teachers communicate interest in students' personal well-being is by communicating personally and regularly with students about their academic progress. This theme is represented in the voice of Diego, who speaks below:

> Diego, Latino male, Type III student: Mr. Berger, yeah he's a fun guy, everybody likes him. He talks to you, he's the one that brings up the subject of life that you're doing and he pushes you to think about college math, as a freshman, like last year he used to push me into taking math. I'm thinking about it now, like we took the PSAT he told me to take it, I did, and I'm waiting for the results. And he just sticks with you all the way till you get something right. He's like a second dad. . . . Just to sum it all up he's just another dad.

> Like he'll call on the telephone. . . . I pick up the phone usually, I have to talk with him [and he'll say] put on your mother please—and then "Have you done your work, have you done your work?" "Yeah, yeah, here's my mom" and like that.

By expressing interest in and concern about students' academic progress, teachers such as Mr. Berger communicate to students that they care. Indeed, students praise teachers who demonstrate even more basic sorts of interest—for example, regularly taking time during class to visit a struggling student individually at his or her seat, noticing a look of confusion on a student's face during a discussion and making sure to clarify material, or taking care not to schedule tests on a day that students have many others.

Students facing borders say explicitly that they not only prefer teachers with whom they have a more personally attentive relationship but also that these teachers are in a much better position to win their cooperation in academic endeavors:

> Jamie, African American female, Type III student: [Ms. Rocke], she's like another mother besides my counselor. My counselor and her, I can talk to about everything, cause she like a person that been with me and my best friend. . . . Because like if I just come to her without a class or something, and I come and ask her something personal about me, she'll tell me "At my age as a grownup and your mother," how she would expect for her to feel. So she'll explain like if I come to her and ask her, you know, how I feel about this guy and stuff.
>
> We owe her something now, now it's like we can't say "we don't know this" and we know her for these many years, you know, there's no way! We can't just say "Oh Mrs. Rocke, we sorry," this and that. No way we can say that! We gotta do it [our work], we owe her that, you know.
>
> Regina, Mexican immigrant female, Type IV student: Once I was just talking to her and she told me "You still work at the car wash?" and I said "Yeah" and she said "Oh that's good." Cause when she saw me without a jacket she's all "Tell your mom to get you a jacket for Christmas" and she goes "Oh, but you work you can get it yourself" and I said "Yeah" and then she said "Are you still working there?" and I'm going "Yeah" and then she asked me about the car wash—how it was, if I got paid well, and this and that, and I guess that's about it.

> Like whenever I'm absent or whenever we plan to cut or whatever,
> I say "No, I have to go to 5th period," all I care about is fifth pe-
> riod. . . . That's about the only class I like. I have to go to that class.

Students such as Jamie and Regina perceive their teachers' inquir-
ies and actions as well intentioned and respond positively. Jamie
earned consistent high grades in her class with Ms. Rocke, and
Regina attends her math class more regularly. For Regina, a posi-
tive relationship is established despite the fact that her teacher
shows naivete about how socioeconomic issues might play out in
Regina's life. (It might be, for example, that Regina's mother can-
not afford to buy a new jacket and that Regina works to contribute to
the family income.) Both Jamie and Regina see these preferred
teachers as individuals with whom they have established some rela-
tionship and also as individuals that show receptivity to discussing
nonacademic as well as academic topics. Hence, the borders
between these students and teachers are reduced and students are
more engaged.

Limited sample size prevents any definitive statements about
group-level differences, but it is interesting to note that relatively
more Latino students as well as many of the African American stu-
dents emphasized teachers' interaction patterns and especially the
positive affect of personalized relationships.[5] This is consistent
with previous research indicating that in an academic context, envi-
ronments structured to foster a sense of interpersonal commitment
can be more highly motivating for African American and Latino
students than those structured for competition and individual
advancement (Fordham, 1991, 1996; Losey, 1995; Metz, 1986).

Authority Patterns

Teacher authority style is mentioned frequently by students who
face borders, with roughly 51% (18 of 35) referring to this when
describing why a particular class is engaging or off-putting. Gener-
ally, students are critical of teachers who do not elicit and support
student input and who strictly enforce status divisions, either by
rigidly enforcing rules and regulations that they create or by

discouraging or preventing youths from expressing their opinions and perspectives or engaging the teacher in dialogue. Conversely, students say they are more willing to listen and engage in classes where adults maintain order but negotiate for student buy-in, establish consistent rules that are perceived as fair rather than arbitrary, and convey respect for students' capabilities and perspectives. Students prefer settings where adults have the ability to establish order and maintain social control but at the same time tend not to like adults who accomplish the former by insisting on complete silence or formality or by setting themselves above and apart from students.

Students are especially critical of disciplinary policies that convey disrespect for their capabilities as young adolescents and communicate that teachers will not permit student input. Blatant manifestations of control negatively affect students' motivation, sense of efficacy, and willingness to cross social borders. In contrast, students like and respect adults who maintain their authority yet manage to establish relaxed, friendly relationships with students. Joey, for example, describes science as his favorite class despite the fact that he dislikes the subject, and he performs well in this class compared to others. He describes social studies as his least favorite class and performs less well. Below, he describes why he prefers and responds more positively to science class:

> Joey, African American male, Type III student: [In science, my favorite teacher] he plays around sometimes. He jokes around and we laugh sometimes. You can talk and eat in that class and that's fine, you do your work at the same time. . . . Yeah. It's not all stiff, where you have to be quiet all the time. Can't say anything, like that.
>
> [In social studies] she sends—she kicks people out of the class for nothing sometimes. . . . they'll like laugh or something? And she'll say "OK, one more time and you're going to be out." And then they'll say "Ah man!" And then "You're talking! Get out!" (laughs) And she'll kick 'em all out. It tripped me out the first week I was in there. I was like "Man, you can't do anything!" But that's the way she is—dumb.

Students describe a variety of disciplinary strategies that they see as more effective and productive. For example, teachers establish

rules but follow them with their students, use humor as a first course to guide students back on track rather than immediately resort to more punitive tactics, or establish structures and activities that allow students to converse while doing work. Most basic, however, teachers work hard to establish positive and respectful interpersonal relationships with students. Having done so, they are able to reestablish order without fostering classroom rebellion, particularly when working with students disenfranchised from school.

Students also respond more positively to teachers who model and promote norms of interaction that convey consideration and respect for student views. As one student describes it:

> Elvira, Filipina American, Type II student: She makes the class feel comfortable talking about themselves and really expressing their feelings. Like if you read something and everyone interprets it differently, she wants to hear everyone's opinion. And everyone gets a chance to say how they feel . . . you really learn a lot. You learn different points of view and how to analyze different things. . . . It's not just memorizing facts and then spitting them back to the teacher.

These types of activities, explain some students, help reduce the sense of social difference and distance among students and the teacher. As one student explains, "Where there's more than just you participating, when it's the teacher participating with you and the students participating with you—anyone participating with you, it becomes interesting because you learn something about that person."

Finally, students prefer teachers who make efforts to demonstrate ways in which adolescents are similar to and capable of interacting with adults. Most important, at the classroom level, teachers communicate their personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and thereby begin to bridge age and status barriers that separate them from their students. Leslie, for example, is a Type III student, excelling in some classes and not others. As she describes her favorite class, she emphasizes among other things how her teacher's willingness to engage students in discussions about world events and to offer his personal opinion about these issues conveys respect for her and her classmates, thereby engaging her in the learning process:

> Leslie, Italian American, Type III student: He's just a fun teacher, he's not boring, he doesn't treat you like you're in second grade—a lot of high school teachers treat you like you're a little kid. And we're not all totally mature adults now, yet, but we're not idiots. . . . He takes the approach that we're more his equal than we are just idiots. People respect him more, so we can have discussions instead of him telling us "This is the way it is, you're stupid, you don't know any better than I do" you know? We have more discussions which is more interesting.
>
> Like in the beginning of class like whatever was on news last night that was really important we talk about what happened, you know things outside of school. Things that are happening in the world and how we feel about it—how he feels about it. And how it's affecting everybody. A conversation more like friends than a teacher just saying "Okay well the bell rang, give me your homework," you know. We talk about other things that are of interest to all of us. We still get our work done though. But we have more discussions.

In addition to conveying personal experiences or perspectives, teachers also use humor to lessen social distance between themselves and their students. Favored teachers in this study tend to joke with students about adolescent concerns, gently rib them about social relationships, and even tease them about their interests when appropriate.

Expectations

The attitudes teachers convey toward social group or individual capabilities, and in particular toward students who differ ethnically or fail to perform academically, form a third critical area of concern for students who face borders, with 29% (10 of 35 students) mentioning this. Specifically, students respond to messages that they perceive about whether they have the potential to fit into the school world, even if their actions seem to indicate that they do not desire to do so. Youths appear hungry for educators to recognize diverse sorts of potential and respond negatively to humiliation techniques that spotlight deficits.

Teachers convey messages about whether a student has the potential to fit into the school world in two primary ways. First, they communicate general expectations for different social groups.

Some students describe how negative expectations or differential treatment produce resignation, alienation, and opposition:

> Johnnie, African American, Type III student: If somebody keeps telling you you're gonna' be nobody, you're going to take that in and you're going to say "Well damn, I'm going to be nobody. Look at my grades, they're right."
>
> Maria, Mexican immigrant, Type II student: They hate Mexicans at this school. That woman from cooking [class], she pulled the students' hair. . . . One of my friends, she was wearing a black dress that was short and tight. She told her first, that that was the way her husband liked them . . . and then she told her that if she wore that skirt again she would send her to the office. . . . The Mexicans are treated badly by all of the teachers.[6] That is also why—the Mexicans get tired of getting treated this way, and that is why we do those [bad] things too.

Underperforming students also describe how they respond to negative comments about their behavioral or cognitive potential vis-à-vis the classroom:

> Saul, Mexican American, Type IV student: We didn't get along when I first went in there. He asked me how come I didn't have a history class at Caulfield High. And I go, "I just didn't." Cause I was in low classes at Caulfield. And then he started yelling at me, he's all, I should have had a history class, I should have asked for it and all this. And I go, "Don't yell at me." . . . And he got all mad and "Saul, go sit in the back of the room." So I sat in the back of the room.
>
> And then one day we had to do a collage. And he gave me that paper, he's all, "I don't think you'll do it, but I'll give it to you anyway." And I did it and he gave me an F. . . . I just took it and ripped it. He's all "At least you got a grade." I go, "Yeah, it's an F."
>
> And then the next day I went in there and he just started yelling at me. And I just started yelling back. He said I was a smart aleck and I just started yelling. I couldn't handle it anymore. I had to sit in House Suspension for the rest of the year.

In turn, students speak positively about teachers who convey confidence in their capabilities and at times link manifestations of equal treatment and high expectations to improved classroom relations and student behavior:

> Maria, Mexican immigrant, Type II student: The class where there's the most respect, from what I've seen, is the social studies class with Mr. Vargas. Because he applies an even hand to Mexicans and Anglos. And that is why no one ever says anything, bad words to him.
>
> Marbella, Mexican immigrant, Type II student: Well, he's [that teacher] a good person. He's on very good terms with us [the Mexican students]. He tells us that he would perhaps like to be Mexican because, well we want to study, we want to be someone in this country. He tells us that many times people who are not born here and who know English don't make use of it, and that sometimes we who don't know it, we make use of it.

In short, students who feel stigmatized say they are more receptive to and appreciative of teachers who treat them with respect and who convey confidence in their capabilities, no matter how poorly they are performing.

PEDAGOGICAL CONCERNS

Students who face borders, as well as those who do not focus frequently on teacher pedagogy when assessing a classroom. As indicated in Table 3, students in general describe engaging and disengaging pedagogical methods and emphasize the importance of clear and helpful explanations.

Students facing borders in particular express strong distaste for lecturing and seatwork. They are also highly critical of teachers who lack clarity in their presentation of content. Finally, relative to their peers they are more likely to express a preference for cooperative group work.

Style and Methods

When assessing classrooms, students tend to mention a variety of pedagogical styles and methods that affect their engagement. For example, students of all types tend to praise teachers who combine humor, enthusiasm, and creativity in their approach to subject matter. At one school, for example, several spoke enthusiastically about a biology teacher who enlivened lectures with jokes and presented creative models and analogies to convey biological ideas. Students facing borders also talk occasionally about the types of

TABLE 3
Students' Perceptions of Pedagogical Factors
That Affect Their Engagement

Factor Identified	Students Who Face Social Borders (n = 35)		Students Who Do Not Face Social Borders (n = 14)	
	%	n	%	n
Style and methods	57.1	20	71.4	10
Humorous, lively, enthused				
are engaging	14.3	5	35.7	5
Discussion, listening to student ideas				
are engaging	8.6	3	28.6	4
Group work is engaging	14.3	5	—	0
Hands-on activities, authentic tasks				
are engaging	14.3	5	7.1	1
Lectures, seatwork, worksheets				
are disengaging	34.3	12	21.4	3
Uncreative, routinized pedagogy				
is disengaging	8.6	3	14.3	2
Quality of explanations	31.4	11	35.7	5
Clear and helpful explanations				
are engaging	20.0	7	28.6	4
Confusing explanations/presentations				
disengaging	25.7	9	14.3	2

activities educators choose to illustrate concepts and ideas, with 14% (5 of 35 students) expressing a preference for hands-on projects, role plays, and other student-directed sorts of activities. Finally, five students (14%) talk enthusiastically about cooperative group work when describing their favorite class.

More commonly, however, students facing borders mention pedagogical factors that inhibit their willingness or ability to perform in certain classes. In particular, a large number (12 of 35 students, or 34%) emphasize that a combination of straightforward lecture, question-answer recitation, and seatwork make it difficult to function.

Specifically, some perceive it extremely difficult if not impossible to maintain focus, listen intently while writing simultaneously, and sit for long periods without talking—that is, to adapt to traditional learning norms and expectations. Furthermore, without

teacher-student interchange, they have little opportunity to convey or address conceptual misunderstandings. In response, some tune out, unable to adapt to classroom behaviors and expectations. For example, Donna, a Latina student who had participated actively and enthusiastically in a less traditionally structured English course the previous year, was silent in her more traditionally structured sophomore English class. In this class, the teacher lectured at length—students had limited input into discussions about stories, poetic devices, or other matters. Explaining her strikingly different classroom persona, Donna said, "Mr. Yana, when he talks I just can't follow what he's saying. So I just give up." Similarly, Johnnie, an African American student speaking about the same teacher explained, "Like, have you ever seen that commercial on Oreo cookies where he goes 'This is our [draws word out] solar system?' That's what it's like. . . . I can't get motivated for that class for nothing." (Both Donna and Johnnie earned As and Bs in English the previous year, but their grades fell to Cs and Ds in this more traditional course.)

Still other students resist these courses altogether. Sonia, for example, accumulated 62 absences in her English course over the course of her sophomore year (in comparison to 28 in science, her favorite course). In explaining such patterns, she compares pedagogical routines in English with the types of pedagogy she prefers:

> Sonia, Mexican American, Type IV student: We read, read, read and that's all we do. It's like every week it's the same routine. On Mondays you come in and do your vocab—definitions. And then Tuesday you read the story, Wednesday keep on reading the story, Thursday answer the questions, and Friday you do a test. Every single week. It's boring to do the same thing every day. . . . We should have like more discussions of the stories that we read and have group work. That would make more the class more interesting. Plus that each week have a different class project.

Overall, students facing borders express a preference for interactive pedagogical strategies that promote active student involvement.

Some educational anthropologists contend that African American and Latino cultures promote group solidarity, group effort, and

interdependence (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987, 1994; Fordham, 1991, 1996; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1993). Nine of the 14 students criticizing lecturing and seatwork come from either African American or Latino backgrounds.[7] Recitation and seatwork centered, teacher-dominated classrooms tend to promote the idea that learning is an individual affair, as academic success depends on articulating individual brief answers to problems that more powerful others define. It is certainly possible that one reason such classrooms prove disengaging is that the norms, values, and expectations promoted there are quite discordant with those students encounter among peers and at home.

Quality of Explanations

A second primary pedagogical concern for students facing borders is whether teachers' explanations are clear and accessible. Students prefer teachers who help them understand classroom material and who take time to explain concepts and ideas carefully and thoroughly; that is, teachers who provide students with conceptual access to academic content and information. Even though this seems an obvious definition of a successful teacher, students do describe teachers whom they perceive as impatient and irritable when they attempt to obtain help or express lack of understanding, or who seem to ignore their conceptual difficulties or concerns. The student speaking below illustrates this:

> Andrea, Vietnamese/Chinese immigrant, Type II student: If you want to ask some questions she only lets you ask the class only two or three [questions] because she's scared, you know, [that] if you ask every single question [you have] the [other] people would copy down the answers. . . . I was smart in math until I got her and I got stupid. She probably make my confidence run down but I'm not interested in math no more. I used to be like the best in every single class of mine. Except now.

Among students facing borders, this concern is mentioned especially often by academically high achieving Type II students who are often one of just a few members of their ethnic group enrolled in advanced track classrooms. These same students sometimes worry

whether European American classmates view their presence as valid. Thus, it is understandable that they are especially concerned that teachers not impede their ability to adapt to classroom expectations with confusing explanations or presentations (see Davidson, 1996, for further discussion of this issue.) Without access to clear explanations, isolated students either have to struggle for understanding alone or seek assistance from peers who they expect already doubt their abilities.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WRITTEN CURRICULUM: THE IMPORTANCE OF RELEVANCE

As indicated in Table 4 below, aspects of the written curriculum are important for both students who face borders and those who do not.

Students of all types, for example, tend to focus on whether they like the subject when describing why they are engaged in a class. However, within this broad category students who face borders are more likely than their peers to assess a class based on its perceived relevance; that is, based on whether the curriculum helps them understand or express something about their personal lives and feeling. In contrast, students who do not face borders tend to mention whether they like the books that a teacher has chosen and/or whether the curriculum is sufficiently challenging.

When personally relevant, curriculum can enhance motivation and effort for students who face borders. Jeffrey, a Type III student, is illustrative of this pattern:

> Jeffrey, European American, Type III student: Yeah, I don't do that [social studies] homework because I don't have time to sit down and do it, I come home—I have to cook my own dinner, so I'm really burned out, really tired, I don't like doing it, so I don't.
> Interviewer: But in peer counseling you always do your homework.
> Jeffrey: Because it's about me. I do things which are about me. . . . Like in English, I'm doing this major assignment. I put a lot of work into it because it's something I know, it's something about me, I'm writing it down. It's really a good short story. . . . I was like the first one that got like a rough draft done and all.

TABLE 4
**Students' Perceptions of Curricular Factors
That Affect Their Engagement**

Factor Identified	Students Who Face Social Borders (n = 35)		Students Who Do Not Face Social Borders (n = 14)	
	%	n	%	n
Relevance is engaging	22.9	8	14.3	2
Books and texts are engaging	—	0	28.6	4
Challenging is engaging	5.7	2	28.6	4
Subject is fun/engaging	34.3	12	35.7	5
Subject is boring/not engaging	14.3	5	21.4	3
Other	17.1	6	35.7	5

Conversely, curriculum viewed as personally irrelevant can increase a student's sense that interests and concerns emanating from aspects of their backgrounds are discounted by the school. In some cases, this strengthens borders between worlds and contributes to disengagement. For example, Rosa, a Type IV Latina student assigned to French rather than Spanish against her wishes, had no motivation for the class and exerted little effort because of this. As she saw it, "French is not helping me any. . . . I have no purpose for it in life." In short, students facing borders argue for a curriculum that allows them to develop and explore personal interests and concerns.

BEYOND STUDENTS' VOICES: A CASE STUDY
OF ENGAGING PRACTICES

While carrying out fieldwork, the study team had an opportunity to observe some of the high school teachers that students describe as particularly effective. This section presents a brief case that illustrates how one of the teachers observed negotiates socioeconomic and sociocultural borders. Her case supports what students say about effective strategies and also gives the reader a concrete look

at how such a classroom functions in practice. At the same time, the case reveals some limitations of the strategies students describe.

Border Negotiation in Wendy Ashton's Classroom

With gently permed hair, flowing cotton clothing, and subtle makeup, Wendy Ashton blends readily into the suburban middle-class community surrounding the high school where she works. She appears equally at home in her classroom, comprised of students who do not move easily across the borders that separate their social worlds. Ashton teaches remedial English, and her students are enrolled there either because of low reading test scores or because teachers in mainstream English classrooms found them too difficult to manage. The majority, though not all, are students of color—Vietnamese immigrant, Latino, and African American youths who typically ride the bus to school from lower income areas of the city. Ashton's descriptions of her colleagues' reactions to her students depicts their position in the school's status hierarchy: "It's 'I don't want to teach those kids!' 'I don't want to be saddled with *those* kids.'"

Ashton, however, is department head and she chooses to teach this course. She describes herself as student-centered "to a fault" and expresses strong desire to help her students connect more easily with the world of the school: "I will do whatever to get their grade up, to have them feel better about themselves, sometimes to the point that I think I'm rescuing them instead of enabling them."

European American and middle class, Ashton is not analytical about social divisions and at times voices common stereotypes or deficit views about the students she teaches. However, she does not distance herself from students. Rather, she employs many of the interactional, pedagogical, and curricular strategies described in the previous section to bridge social borders. For example, Ashton moves through the room during work periods, touching some students on the shoulders and speaking briefly with others when she senses discomfort. Quieter students sit in the front of the room, explains Ashton, "so I have a lot of eye contact and I can touch them every once in awhile, just briefly touch them, to make contact with

them." When students face pressing external concerns, at times Ashton will negotiate deadlines, though she agonizes each time: "They need to fall down and not be able to turn things in late. Then if I had the kind of home life some of these kids had, have, maybe I'd want a teacher to not be so rigid. You know? There's a fine line between instilling responsibility and being flexible and being able to negotiate with them and teaching them that they need to know how to negotiate." Illustrative of her personalized approach, Ashton spent time out of class listening to the concerns of a female Vietnamese immigrant student interviewed as part of this study. As this student saw it, Ashton communicated willingness to develop personalized relationships with students: "A certain teacher, you are close to them, you could talk serious, and you would talk about the personal life sometimes. A teacher could give you advice. Ms. Ashton [is one of them]."

Ashton also tends to align herself with students and to promote a democratic classroom atmosphere. She appears willing to try to view things from the stance of a student and structures her environment accordingly. For example, when dealing with more verbal, rambunctious students prone to classroom banter, Ashton shows her sense of humor and uses teasing to push them back on track. We see her employing this strategy in the following segment of classroom discourse:

> Ms. Ashton's students are preparing to write an essay on how army ants have been used during history. She is working with her students to develop an essay outline [in the form of a visual map] on the chalkboard. A.J., a student sent to Ms. Ashton from another teacher after being "sent out on a daily basis for being disruptive," is sitting in the back of the room applying lotion to his legs.
>
> Ms. Ashton: Can somebody tell me one way an army ant was used? You can tell this based on your memory or your reading. Now nobody (inaudible) while we discuss this. I want everyone's attention focused up here. Now give me one way they were used.
>
> Naomi: Their heads were used as stitches. They used it for stitches!
>
> Ms. Ashton: Alright. [Adds this to the map on the board] Alright, should you add anything to that? Would you need to explain a little bit how they did that? How did they do that?
>
> A.J.: They were, they let the ants bite it.

> Ms. Ashton: Now who is they?
>
> A.J.: The cavemen, heh-heh. [Students laugh] The old, the people with the hurts, the boo-boos.
>
> Ms. Ashton: (smiling) You're going to have worse than a boo-boo A.J. . . . Johnnie. Let's hear it Johnnie. Help this fellow out. Who made them, who put the killer ants on the wound?
>
> A.J.: The doctors.

Ashton also allows her students to change places in the classroom. And, although school rules prohibit eating and drinking in classrooms, Ashton allows eating because she feels that her students get hungry. She also eats in front of them herself. Explaining her willingness to relax typical classroom rules, Ashton comments, "I don't like to structure—they're structured enough. Good God. All day long. You know?"

Finally, Ashton uses innovative pedagogical and curricular techniques that promote a wide variety of skills and reward diverse abilities. She emphasizes reading for understanding, writing development, and a variety of cognitive skills including oral performance and cooperation. Work in English revolves largely around novels that Ashton reads aloud, such as *Where the Red Fern Grows* and *Of Mice and Men*. As Ashton explains, "I refuse to use a standard textbook. I always find new material constantly, that I think kids—that will motivate kids, as opposed to sticking to the required curriculum, that a lot of kids just moan about." Students do vocabulary, developing their lists from their reading. They draw to illustrate their understanding of written scenes. Ashton also engages students in frequent in-class discussions, pushing them to sharpen their descriptive abilities, make inferences, and identify various writing techniques. Ashton emphasizes and rewards oral performance by giving points during discussions. She also encourages group displays of knowledge. Students do not just respond to Ashton's queries but are also allowed to respond to and build on each other's comments.

It is apparent that Ashton successfully employs these strategies to bridge borders that can prevent positive relationships from developing between teachers and students. For one, Ashton does not worry about discipline and although her room becomes loud at times, in all we observed little evidence that she finds it overly

difficult to maintain classroom decorum. Furthermore, Ashton is able to push students academically. For example, Ashton generally does not allow students to answer "I don't know." When a student resists, Ashton is usually able to negotiate for added effort, as illustrated below:

> [Ashton and students are reviewing a text and accompanying questions that focus on initial attempts to integrate national baseball leagues. Ruben, a Latino student, has just read aloud from part of the text.]
>
> Ashton: Ruben, in your own words, why did this man support these black players? He said that what in essence?
>
> Ruben: Ahhh,. . . I don't know.
>
> Ashton: Yeah, I think you do know. Page 45.
>
> Ruben: (reading from the text in a rushed manner) They're citizens of the United States of America.
>
> Ashton: Yeah, keep going, they're citizens, keep going, and?
>
> Ruben: So they had as much rights as anyone else.
>
> Ashton: Exactly. So can you put that in your own words to answer the question?
>
> Ruben: I know, I don't know. I already did it.
>
> Ashton: What is the question asking you down here?
>
> Ruben: (sounding exasperated) Who is Jackie Robinson?
>
> Ashton: George Brick.
>
> Ruben: Oh. George Brick supported the rights of black players to play in the National League because. . .
>
> Ashton: he felt that
>
> Ruben: Because he felt, God Ms. Ashton, you bug.
>
> (Other students chuckle)
>
> Ruben: (speaking very rapidly) he wanted citizens to have as much rights don't call me back.
>
> Ashton: Thank you! Absolutely right.

Generally, students with whom we spoke respond positively to Ashton's prodding. They appear to trust her and thus interpret her persistence as evidence of caring. As one put it, "Miss Ashton, she'd go all off on the board and she'll tell you—you know, 'If you think you can't even spell this word, think you're going to go in the English class next year?'. . . She won't put you down, she'll talk to you and she'll go 'Yeah, you know I love you. You know I want you to make something out of yourself, so stop messing around in class.'"

Ashton's class offers a powerful example of how a teacher can negotiate effectively across social borders. Nevertheless, it is problematic in two important regards. First, although Ashton expects her students to work while they are in class, she asks little of them outside of the classroom. Strong students who move from her class into mainstream English classrooms tend to have a difficult time making the necessary transition. Though this certainly reflects students' generally negative responses to the traditional curriculum and lecture-based pedagogy found in these courses, it also reflects the fact that Ashton's students are used to leaving school concerns inside the classroom boundary.

Second, and perhaps more important, Ashton's curriculum, though innovative, does little to help her students take a critical stance toward social conditions or to formulate questions about structural and social factors that limit and perpetuate inequalities in school and society. Nor does Ashton address such topics in classroom discussion. As such, her students are ill-equipped to ask questions about the forces and conditions that impede their academic progress or that affect their lives outside of school. They are certainly in no position to ask questions about the traditional curriculum that they encounter in mainstream English classrooms.

FINAL COMMENTS

Drawing on data from 49 students, this article describes interactional, pedagogical, and curricular factors that affect students' responses to classroom settings. Teachers' actions do matter to students, and teachers can negotiate for students' attention in positive and negative ways. Students facing borders respond well to teachers who give personal attention to students, who convey respect for and confidence in students who are socially different than themselves, and who support and elicit student voice and input. Students also express strong distaste for lecturing and seatwork and prefer personally relevant curriculum.

One strong theme that emerges from these findings is the fundamental importance of students' relationships with classroom teachers. (Recall that when assessing their classes, more than 90% of

students who face borders emphasize either the degree of personalization in teacher-student relationships, authority patterns, and/or teacher expectations.) This finding is quite consistent with the idea that productive educational interactions between stigmatized students and teachers are more likely to occur when students trust the good intentions of the teacher (Erickson, 1987; Phelan et al., 1998). When students do not face borders, classroom teachers may keep a professorial distance from their students with little apparent harm, perhaps because these students have a basic trust in the school as an institution. However, for students facing borders, negative relationships can determine whether students feel further alienated from the school as an institution. In some cases, this may influence whether a student continues coming to class at all. Studies of at-risk youth indicate that one of the most important factors for encouraging resiliency and continued effort is forming an attentive, caring relationship with an adult (Anthony, 1974; Garmezy, 1991; Werner & Smith, 1989). The findings presented here are consistent with this research.

Therefore, it is clear that when seeking to develop more inclusive approaches to education, schools and teachers must think beyond written curriculum or new pedagogical techniques. On a daily basis, the degree of personalization in teacher-student relationships, authority patterns, and teacher expectations work in combination with the written curriculum and a school's social organization to convey messages to students about the possibilities of working and interacting with people who are socially different and about students' places in the social structure (see Davidson, 1994, for an extended discussion of this issue). Thus, the explicit curriculum, even if socially critical, may not be sufficient to engage the attention of marginalized students. Similarly, simply placing students in detracked classrooms or cooperative work groups may do little to address social borders and, in some cases, may even make social borders more apparent (Cohen & Lotan, 1995; Davidson, 1996; Miller & Harrington, 1992).

To reinforce the point that a critical and culturally inclusive written curriculum and detracking are not, in and of themselves sufficient to bring about change, I describe students' reactions to a

heterogeneously grouped social studies class also observed during the Students' Multiple Worlds Study. Here, a politically liberal teacher refers often to economic and political oppression. He exhorts his students to think critically about their text and the world around them. Furthermore, he raises questions about the school's tendency to equate strong academic performance with future success; for example, "I don't want people to sell themselves short because they're B and C students. Because I'll tell you straight, I see B and C students, when they get on the job, they are fantastic." At the same time, this teacher delivers his curriculum via sermon-like lectures, manages his classroom through intimidation, makes no effort to develop positive educational relationships with his students, and does not challenge the stratification that continues to permeate his detracked classroom through the use of cooperative grouping or other alternative pedagogical approaches. The teacher and this class was uniformly criticized by the five youths we interviewed who attended his course. Strikingly, students of color read their teacher's descriptions of the social system as manifestations of racism rather than as attempts to encourage them to look more critically at the world around them; for example, "To me he was putting down Mexicans saying stuff—like he would actually say 'Mexicans are the ones that are mostly in low class jobs and low class houses and welfare and stuff.' It was like, I don't know, he just like put Mexicans down a lot." In short, this teacher's interactional style and pedagogical techniques subvert the socially critical curricular messages he seeks to convey.

Nevertheless, this certainly does not mean that curriculum and pedagogy are not essential considerations. A second strong theme that emerges in this data is support for some of the more basic ideas advanced by multicultural curricular theorists, particularly those writing from the position of critical social theory. These scholars tend not only to emphasize written curriculum and texts that are socially critical and inclusive but also reformed pedagogical strategies that promote student voice and actively involve students in the learning process. These types of changes are seen as one route to provide students with the skills and learning experiences necessary to both understand and combat social oppression (Banks, 1993,

1995; Banks & Banks, 1995; Giroux, 1992; Sleeter, 1991; Sleeter & Grant, 1987). Note that students in this study do express a strong preference for more democratic classrooms and for pedagogy that promotes student voice and actively involves them in the learning process. They also enjoy curriculum that allows them to explore and express things about their own lives. And, although students do not mention culturally inclusive or socially critical curriculum specifically when assessing their classes, it is important to remember that the students interviewed were reacting only to the types of interaction patterns, curriculum, and pedagogy that they experienced. If large numbers of students were exposed to this type of curriculum on a regular basis, they might mention it when describing factors that affect their willingness and ability to adapt to classroom settings.

To create classroom environments that engage students of all social backgrounds, it is essential to identify strategies that educators can use to help eliminate the detrimental effects of social borders. Students, at least those who speak in this study, do not require or expect educators to behave perfectly or in a way that is entirely consistent with practices and behaviors they have seen in their homes or communities. Rather, students are willing to accept a fairly broad range of behaviors from teachers, as long as students are convinced that, in fact, the educator does sincerely care about them and will sincerely make efforts to help them succeed. This article allows adolescents to tell us some of the things that educators can do to communicate these types of messages and thereby develop classroom environments where diverse teachers and students work productively together.

NOTES

1. A Pendleton is a type of shirt that, at the time of this study, was often worn by those associated with Latino gangs in the local region.

2. For example, some educational anthropologists suggest that teachers change or broaden their interaction patterns to become more congruent with those of the children they serve in order to lessen the cultural differences children encounter when moving between home and school. This type of approach, proponents reason, may make it easier for children to succeed because they encounter behaviors and expectations like those seen at home (Au,

1980; Au & Jordan, 1981; Heath, 1982; Moll & Diaz, 1987; Tharp & Gallimore, 1991; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987). Curricular theorists argue for reforming curriculum so that it is more culturally and socially inclusive and therefore less alienating to students who typically go unrepresented (e.g., see Banks, 1993, 1995; Banks & Banks, 1995; Giroux, 1992; Sleeter, 1991; Sleeter & Grant, 1987). Educational psychologists and sociologists, among others, suggest cooperative classroom work structures (groupwork) designed not only to maximize learning for all but also to minimize the social stigma associated with academic and ethnic differences (e.g., see Cohen & Lotan, 1995; Hertz-Lazarowitz, Kirkus, & Miller, 1992). Finally, literature concerned with the social organization of schooling, desegregation, and teachers' varied expectations for students offers additional insights into the creation and amelioration of social borders (e.g. see Cooper & Tom, 1984; Oakes, 1985; Schofield, 1989; Spindler & Spindler, 1982; Wells & Crain, 1994).

3. Over the course of the Students' Multiple Worlds Study, six distinctive patterns of congruence and movement among worlds emerged (Phelan & Davidson, 1993; Phelan et al., 1998). For a detailed description of how students were assigned to categories in this typology, please see Phelan, Yu, & Davidson (1994).

4. This table as well as those that follow summarize in numeric form themes that emerged during analysis of an interview in which 49 students select their favorite and least favorite classrooms and explain why they have done so. Looking first at Table 1 and taking the row titled "Teachers' interaction patterns" as an example, the numbers should be interpreted as follows. Of the 35 students who face social borders, 32 of them or 91.4% alluded to some teacher interaction pattern or patterns when explaining why they identified a class as their most or least favorite. In contrast, 10 or 71.4% of the 14 students who do not face social borders alluded to a teacher interaction pattern or patterns when explaining why they identified a class as their most or least favorite. Note that categories are not mutually exclusive. That is, a student might refer to both teacher interaction patterns and teacher pedagogy when assessing a classroom and their responses would be recorded in both of these categories accordingly.

Tables 2-4 provide more specific information about each of the general factors presented in Table 1. For example, Table 2 summarizes specific teacher interaction patterns that students respond to favorably and unfavorably. For example, looking at column two of Table 2 we see that 17 of the 35 students who face social borders refer positively or negatively to some aspect of a teacher's relational style when assessing classrooms. Of these students, 13 say that teachers who give them personal attention are more engaging, 4 say that teachers who are emotionally distant or seem not to care about students are disengaging, and 2 say that teachers who are irritable or mean are disengaging. As in Table 1, students can appear in multiple categories.

5. Specifically, 7 of 15 Latino and 3 of 5 African American students participating in the Students' Multiple Worlds Study emphasize personalized relationships with teachers when explaining ratings for a given class. This compares to 4 of the 16 European American and 3 of the 11 Asian-descent students.

6. This incident is also described by two of the three other Spanish-speaking students in our sample.

7. Specifically, 4 of 5 African American and 3 of 15 Latino students emphasize their distaste for lectures and/or seatwork when describing their least favorite class. In addition, two of the three multiethnic students, both of partial Latino descent, emphasize this.

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