CHAPTER 2
Renegotiating Cultural Diversity in American Schools

STUDENTS’ MULTIPLE WORLDS:
NAVIGATING THE BORDERS OF FAMILY, PEER, AND SCHOOL CULTURES

Patricia Phelan, Ann Locke Davidson, and Hanh Cao Yu

First, you must understand and digest the fact that children, all children come to school motivated to enlarge their worlds. You start with their worlds. You do not look at them, certainly not initially, as organisms to be molded and regulated. You look at them to determine how what they are, seek to know, and have experienced can be used as the fuel to fire the process for enlargement of interest, knowledge, and skills. You do not look at them in terms of deficits: what they do not know but need to know. Far from having deficits, they are asset rich. You enter their world in order to aid them and you to build bridges between two worlds, not walls. (Sarason, 1990, p. 164)

This study focuses on understanding students’ multiple worlds and the transitions between them in an effort to provide information that will assist teachers, administrators, and others who work with students to build bridges between their worlds and the world of school. Our purpose is twofold: first, to describe family, school, and peer worlds, and the interrelationships among them, and in particular how meanings and understandings combine to affect students’ engagement with learning; second, to understand students’ perceptions of boundaries and borders between worlds and the adaptation strategies they employ as they move from one context to another. We are especially interested in features in school environments that aid or impede students in making the transition between their worlds and the world of school.

We use the term “world” to mean the cultural knowledge and behavior found within the boundaries of students’ particular families, peer groups, and schools; we presume that each world contains values and beliefs, expectations, actions, and emotional responses familiar to insiders. We use the terms “social setting,” “arena,” and “context” to refer to the places and events within which individuals act and interact. Students employ cultural knowledge acquired from their family, peer, and school worlds in social settings and contexts. Social settings and contexts may be found within the bounds of any one world (e.g., a student having dinner with family members) or may include actors from various worlds (e.g., students interacting with friends in classrooms or friends in each others’ homes). In the latter case, people in the same social setting may or may not share the same cultural knowledge acquired from the constellation of their individual worlds.

Similar to Erickson (1987), we refer to boundaries as real or perceived lines between worlds, settings, or contexts that are neutral and where sociocultural components are perceived to be equal by the people in each setting. When boundaries exist, movement between worlds occurs with relative ease—social and psychological costs are minimal. Alternatively, borders are real or perceived lines that are not neutral and that separate worlds not perceived as equal. When borders are present, movement and adaptation are frequently difficult because the knowledge and skills in one world are more highly valued and esteemed than those in another. Although it is possible for students to navigate borders with apparent success, these transitions can incur personal and psychic costs invisible to teachers and others. Moreover, borders can become impenetrable barriers when the psychosocial consequences of adaptation become too great.

Although the concepts we use are not new, prior research generally has focused on families, peers, and schools as distinct entities. We know that any one can affect powerfully the direction in which adolescents will be pulled. For example, dynamic teachers, vigorous schools, and programs targeted to override the negative effects associated with low socioeconomic status, limited motivation, and language and cultural barriers can produce committed, interested, and academically engaged individuals (Abi-Nader, 1990; Edmonds, 1979; Heath, 1982; Johnson & Johnson, 1981; Joyce, Murphy, Showers, & Murphy, 1989; Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1979; Sharan, 1980; Slavin, 1988; Slavin & Madden, 1989; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987; Walberg, 1986). Likewise, research on peer groups

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has described the potency and force with which members pull young people toward the norms of groups (Clasen & Brown, 1985; Clement & Harding, 1978; Coleman, 1963; Eckert, 1989; Larkin, 1979; Ueda, 1987; Varenne 1982). We know too that family indices, such as socioeconomic status and parents' educational levels, are important predictors of students' engagement with educational settings (Jencks et al., 1972), as are cultural expectations and beliefs (Clark, 1983; Erickson, 1987; Fordham, 1988; Gibson, 1987; Hoffman, 1988; McDermott, 1987; Ogbu, 1983, 1987; Spindler, 1987; Spindler & Spindler, 1982; Suarez-Orozco, 1985, 1987; Trueba, 1988; Trueba, Moll, Diaz, & Díaz, 1982).

In other words, we know a great deal about how aspects of families, schools and teachers, and peer groups independently affect educational outcomes. But we know little about how these worlds combine in the day-to-day lives of adolescents to affect their engagement with school and classroom contexts. Steinberg, Brown, Cider, Kaczmarek, and Lazzaro (1988) also note this neglect in educational research: "Virtually absent from the literature are studies that examine student and contextual influences in interaction with each other" (p. 43). Further, while it is in these different arenas that young people negotiate and construct their realities, for the most part, their movements and adaptations from one setting to another are taken for granted. Although such transitions frequently require students' efforts and skills, especially when contexts are governed by different values and norms, there has been relatively little study of this process.

In this study our focus is on the individual as the mediator and integrator of meaning and experience, in contrast to single context approaches that compartmentalize aspects of students' lives (studies in which peer groups, family, and school variables are studied independently of one another). Although research in these areas has provided a great deal of important information, it is the researcher who determines the focus. Our emphasis is rather on the worlds of the individual child. Studies focusing on peer groups alone may miss the significance of school and classroom features that determine the choice or effects of a peer group. Likewise, studies of teachers and pedagogy can obscure features of adolescents' lives, such as peer group interactions or cultural background factors, which combine to impact students' engagement with learning.

Educators attempting to create optimal school environments for increasingly diverse populations need to know how students negotiate borders successfully, or alternatively, how they are impeded by barriers (and borders) that prevent their connection, not only with institutional contexts, but with peers who are different from themselves. We feel that it is particularly important to direct attention to school features that enable smooth transitions, and transform borders, real or perceived, into passable boundaries.

THE STUDENTS' MULTIPLE WORLDS STUDY

During this 2-year longitudinal study, the student study team has had an opportunity to know 54 students in 4 high schools increasingly well. The large, urban, desegregated schools in our sample are paired across districts: "Maple High School" ("Montevideo District") and "Explorer High School" ("Bolivar District") have experienced fairly dramatic changes in the demography of their student populations, whereas "Canyon High School" ("Montevideo District") and "Huntington High School" ("Bolivar District") have had more stable, middle-class student populations. A majority of the students, selected to represent some of the diversity found in many of California's large urban high schools, were in their first year of high school when the study began in the fall of 1989. Students vary in a number of dimensions, including gender, ethnicity, achievement level, immigrant status, and school attendance. An equal number of academic high- and low-achieving students were selected from each school and both minority and majority students are included in the two achievement categories. Students were asked to participate by school personnel.

Four in-depth interviews with each of 54 students provide information on students' perceptions of classrooms and schools, the importance and influence of friends and peer groups, and the family conditions that are significant in their lives. In addition, informal conversations and interviews with 10 of the 54 students supplement more formal data collection methods. Observations in classrooms furnish documentation of interactions between adolescents and their teachers and peers in classroom contexts. Student record data (which include standardized test scores, grades, teacher comments, and attendance and referral records) contribute a picture of achievement patterns and teacher perceptions of individual students over time. Additionally, we obtained demographic and descriptive information about students and their families. Finally, we interviewed teachers about their perceptions of students' academic performance, classroom interactions, social and peer group behavior, and family background.

As the study began, our emphasis was on students' descriptions of school factors that affect their engagement with learning—for example, classroom organization, teacher attitudes and behaviors, pedagogy, and overall school climate. However, the use of open-ended interviews allowed students to talk about other features of their lives (i.e., peers and family)
that are relevant to their feelings about school. "I wouldn't let them put me in a higher track because I wanted to be with my friends," reported one student. "At least in my family it's sort of expected that you're going to try to get A's or something close," said another. "Being Mexican means being popular, cutting classes, acting crazy," reported yet another student.

As a result, a model evolved to describe students' multiple worlds and the relationships among them. Particularly important is our focus on the nature of boundaries and borders between worlds, as well as strategies that students employ to move between and adapt to different contexts and settings. As depicted in Figure 2.1, the meanings drawn from each of these worlds combine to influence students' actions. For example, if parents emphasize school achievement but friends devalue good grades, young people must incorporate and manage these different perspectives while deciding on their own course of action. The emergence of the Multiple Worlds model is an important development of this investigation. Unlike most other approaches, which focus attention on stable characteristics of individuals (e.g., gender and ethnicity) or concentrate on language acquisition or achievement level alone, the Multiple Worlds model is generic. It is not ethnic, achievement, or gender specific, but transcends these categories to consider multiple worlds, boundary crossing, and adaptation for all students. The generic nature of the model is particularly useful for understanding diversity within ethnic groups. For example, we have seen that students—Latino, Asian American, African American, and European American—may perceive borders very differently and utilize various adaptation strategies as they move from one setting to another.

By focusing on transitions, we have been able to identify a number of different types of borders that students encounter. Psychosocial, sociocultural, socioeconomic, linguistic, gender, and structural borders all impede students' connection with classroom and school contexts. Borders are created in several ways and each type is characterized by distinctive properties that are important to understand as educators attempt to identify strategies that will enable students to make transitions successfully.

**Borders**

**Psychosocial.** Psychosocial borders are constructed when children experience anxiety, depression, apprehension, or fear at a level that disrupts or hinders their ability to focus on classroom tasks, or blocks their ability to establish relationships with teachers or peers in school environments. Psychosocial borders can also prevent students' connections with peers or family. It is certainly possible that psychosocial borders are secondary to or result from a child's response to sociocultural, socioeconomic, or linguistic borders. However, other events in children's lives can also create psychosocial borders, for example, stress and anxiety resulting from a physically or sexually abusive home situation; a parent's serious illness; the death of a pet; or other non-border-related events. In some cases, psychosocial borders are temporal in nature. In other words, anxiety and stress connected with a particular event can be reduced as circumstances change.

**Sociocultural.** When the cultural components in one world are viewed as less important than those in another, sociocultural borders are created. A number of authors have defined and directed attention to the significance of sociocultural boundaries and borders: Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991); Erickson (1987); Barth (1969); McDermott and Gospodinoff (1979); Erickson and Bekker (1986). Like Erickson (1987) and Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991), we believe that cultural differences per se do not necessarily create barriers to school participation and learning. In fact, it is certainly possible to view cultural differences as assets rather than as liabilities.
Socioeconomic. Socioeconomic borders are generated when economic circumstances create severe limitations. For example, the economic situation of a family may require a student to work outside the home thus making school participation (academic, social, and extracurricular) difficult or impossible. Or a student, economically constrained, may be precluded from involvement with peers whose economic circumstances are greater. And finally, socioeconomic borders can result from students' community and neighborhood conditions that contrast with their school environment—this is particularly true for students who are transported. Although sociocultural and socioeconomic borders combine frequently, this is not always the case. We feel the distinction is worthwhile when intervention strategies are considered.

Linguistic. Linguistic borders result when communication between students' worlds (home and school, peer and home, and so on) is obstructed, not because of different languages per se, but because one group regards another group's language as unacceptable or inferior. As Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991) state:

The very act of learning English as a second language is a cultural variation, but it does not necessarily create distress for children. A conflict ensues when children, limited in English proficiency, are taught all of their academic curriculum in English in such a way that their native language and culture are invalidated. (p. 28)

In our study, language differences became borders when teachers or students saw language as a problem.

Gender. When the school as an institution or the people in it promote roles, aspirations, or estimates of worth to women that differ from those it offers to men, gender borders exist. Gender borders can be found in both the substance and the process of the educational experience—in the content of the curriculum (i.e., when the history and accomplishments of one group are fully or partially excluded from the curriculum), in pedagogical styles and methods (i.e., when teacher attention and encouragement are more frequently directed towards one group), and in attitudes and expectations (i.e., when the sensibilities, problems and assets of one group are viewed differently than those of the other). Gender borders not only undermine self-confidence and block students' perceptions of what is possible for themselves and others, but also discourage or impede the acquisition of skills necessary to pursue specific careers.

Structural. Structural borders occur between students' home or peer worlds and the world of school. We define structural borders as features in school environments that prevent, impede, or discourage students from engaging fully in learning—social or academic. Three types of conditions give rise to structural borders:

1. Availability—In this case, the school environment lacks adequate resources and supports to meet students' needs, for example, inadequate tutoring, no counselors, insufficiently equipped libraries, inadequate second language training, and so forth.

2. Bridges—Services and opportunities for students exist in the school setting but there are no bridges to connect students with available resources. In other words, students do not have information about programs and opportunities that are available to them or, if they possess such knowledge, no one in the environment assists them in accessing resources that may be potentially beneficial.

3. Match—Structures and services are available and visible to students but either they do not match student needs or they actually impede students' connection with school and classroom settings, for example, an anti-abortion poster hung on a counselor's office door, tracking, severe and punitive discipline policies, and so on.

Although there is often overlap between these distinctions, we believe that the development and implementation of successful intervention strategies depends on the ability of teachers and others in school environments to recognize and identify not only where and when borders exist (e.g., between peers and schools, school and home, and so on), but also the nature of the borders that students encounter.

TYPOLOGY OF ADAPTATION

As our study has proceeded we have found a good deal of variety in students' descriptions of their worlds and in their perceptions of boundaries and borders. At the same time, we have also uncovered distinctive patterns among students as they cross settings. We use a typology to illustrate four patterns:

Type I: Congruent Worlds/Smooth Transitions
Type II: Different Worlds/Border Crossings Managed
Type III: Different Worlds/Border Crossings Difficult
Type IV: Different Worlds/Borders Impenetrable
The patterns we describe are not necessarily stable for individual students over time, but rather can be affected by external conditions such as classroom or school climate conditions, family circumstances, or changes in peer group affiliations.

Each of the four types includes the variety of combinations possible with respect to perceived boundaries and borders (e.g., between family and school, peers and family, peers/family and school, and so on) and each combination is characterized in different ways by different students. Our descriptions of students illustrate only some of the combinations possible. Both enabling and limiting patterns of behavior are contained in this typology. We will see that some of the superficially approved styles of adaptation can be as potentially restricting as those where discordant patterns seem to dominate.

Type I: Congruent Worlds/Smooth Transitions

For some students, values, beliefs, expectations, and normative ways of behaving are, for the most part, parallel across worlds. Although the circumstances of daily contexts change, such students perceive the boundaries between their family, peer, and schools worlds as easily manageable. Movement from one setting to another is harmonious and uncomplicated. This does not mean that students act exactly the same way or discuss the same things with teachers, friends, and family members, but rather that commonalities among worlds override differences. In these cases, students’ worlds are merged by their common sociocultural components rather than bounded by conspicuous differences.

"Ryan Moore". Ryan Moore, a European-American middle-class student at Explorer High School in the Bolivar School District, typifies an adolescent whose worlds are congruent. According to Ryan, all of the people in his life essentially believe and value the same things. When Ryan leaves his family in the morning and joins his friends to walk to school he does not have to shift gears. His friends and their parents esteem the same things as Ryan and his parents—family cohesiveness and education are primary values.

Interviewer: So it sounds like you sought out the kids who have the same values you do?
Ryan: Yeah, it works better that way because all the people that don't really get good grades in our group, they want to get

At school, teachers' language and communication styles, teachers' conceptions of the necessary strategies for success such as compliance, hard work, and academic achievement, and prevailing upward mobility norms match the values, beliefs, and behaviors of Ryan's family, making transitions between home and school unproblematic. Further, Ryan learned quickly how to function successfully in the school setting—who has the power, where to go for help, what things can be changed, and what things can't. According to Ryan, "You just have to learn the rules of the game." Ryan not only has learned the rules, he has become an expert player. For example, unhappy with an experimental freshman history course, Ryan and a friend initiated a meeting with the school principal and history department faculty to suggest changes. Transferring elements from his home world, Ryan is able to affect his own school experience.

Ryan: If it's really affecting me, I'll say, 'I've got to change this just because I figure, why sit around when you can change it?' ... [that's how] it's always been ... with me. It's also like my parents from the beginning, you know, [said] 'If you want something to be different, go out and change it.' It's just been like, if I wanted to make something work, I just did it.
Interviewer: In this situation you weren't intimidated by the people?
Ryan: Basically, I go on and I'm nice and cordial and if you're nice to me then that's fine. And if you're not, if you're like closed to what I have to say then it just makes me want to win
more. I guess I'm highly competitive. I know that from my sports and stuff. And so, it's kind of like a competition is how I guess I view it. If I got a B in the class it's like I lost. And I want to change that, or let it be known that it was unfair.

Although Ryan likes some teachers better than others, his academic performance is unaffected by his preferences—he does well across subjects. For the most part, his long-term goals and aspirations allow him to overlook, ignore, or rationalize classroom circumstances that are not optimal in his view. Working toward future aspirations takes precedence over any immediate discomfort he may feel because of a particular class or teacher. However, when he perceives his future to be threatened (e.g., by an unfair grade), he quickly takes steps to rectify the situation.

Across his worlds, people's perceptions of Ryan are remarkably similar. Parents, friends, and teachers all report that Ryan is an excellent student, a thoughtful learner, and a "really nice kid, well-liked by everybody." Everyone expects that Ryan will get good grades, will behave in a thoughtful and mature manner, and will no doubt attend a prestigious college. Ryan's expectations of himself are not dissimilar.

Ryan: Everybody wants to get good grades because I mean now, everybody sees their future. And they realize that you can't mess around in school—you can mess around after school but you've got to be serious while you're here.

Interviewer: What do you see yourself doing in four years?

Ryan: Oh, I want to go to Polytechnic 'cause my dad went there. I like it there, it seems like the kind of school I'd like.

An important feature binding Ryan's worlds together is that the actors in his life move across boundaries as well. For example, Ryan's parents have always been actively involved in school affairs, and currently both of his parents participate in parent programs at Explorer High School. Ryan's teachers either know his parents or are aware of their school involvement. Ryan describes his parents as supportive of his school activities and he is proud that they take an active role. Likewise, Ryan's friends live in his neighborhood, "hang out" at his house, and interact comfortably with his parents. There is nothing about Ryan's family (culturally or socioeconomically) that sets him apart from his friends or their families. Getting together with friends also reinforces these similarities.

Ryan's friends also cross into his school world—he does not, for example, leave his friends in the neighborhood to go across town to a distant school. At school, Ryan and his friends are in an accelerated academic track and frequently have the same teachers. As a result, teachers not only know Ryan's friends but they also know or at least have some knowledge of his family.

Rarely, however, do Ryan and his friends intermingle with students in other peer groups. At Explorer High School, students describe borders between groups as rigid and impenetrable. Ryan's response when asked if ethnic groups intermingle illuminates his view of students' differences and illustrates border maintenance measures:

If they speak Spanish and don't speak English, or they speak Vietnamese but hardly any English, they tend to hang together. But if they speak English well, they'll hang around with other people, except for the Hispanics—they tend to hang around in gangs.

Not formal gangs, just—they're kind of like a group that goes around and you see and you realize, 'okay, they're here, I want to be there. When they're there, I want to be there.' It seems like they don't want to be bused here. So they're going to make our lives miserable here and bring with them the way they hang downtown . . . it's because they think, well we had to get bused down here because somebody spoke up, and now we don't want to be here, so let's let them know that we don't want to be here.

Ryan and his friends have little contact with or knowledge about students different than themselves. Classroom and school climate features at Explorer exacerbate these circumstances. For example, tracking in some subjects serves to segregate Ryan and his friends from students in lower-level classes. In Ryan's untracked general science class (which he was required to take as a freshman) pedagogy is teacher dominated and there is little interaction or discussion among students. When answering end-
of-chapter questions, Ryan works exclusively with his friends and views other students in the class, who are not as academically successful, as responsible for an unchallenging curriculum. None of Ryan’s classes offer cooperative learning techniques and few provide opportunities for students to work together or to discuss ideas. Further, most of the curriculum includes limited information about people of color or wider socioeconomic issues dealing with reasons for stratification and unequal opportunities. In general, Explorer’s school environment provides little opportunity for Ryan or his friends to move (intellectually or physically) outside of their bounded, congruent worlds. For the most part, school features mitigate against the development of intergroup understandings.

“Joseph Foster”. Other students in our sample also describe congruent worlds where boundary crossing is not a problem. This type is not unfamiliar, and, not surprisingly, it frequently includes European-American, middle- to upper-middle-class, high-achieving adolescents. However, not all of these students are high achieving. For example, Joseph Foster, a middle-class European-American student at Canyon High School in the Montevideo School District, maintains passing grades (mostly D’s and C’s) and has no desire to achieve at a higher level. Nor do Joseph’s teachers or parents expect him to do so. Joseph’s teachers and counselor say that he is performing as well as he can and his parent’s primary expectations are that he pass his classes and graduate from high school. Nobody, including Joseph, expects that he will go to college.

However, Joseph is clear about his future and everyone (parents, friends, and teachers) supports his goals. Like his father, Joseph plans to enter the construction business and aspire to own his own company.

Joseph: I want to be a contractor. . . . well, that’s what my dad is.
Yeah, I want to have my own business. [My dad], well, he wants me to do that, and my mom, she sees that my dad does good, so she thinks it’s a good idea.

Interviewer: What about their expectations in terms of school?
Joseph: Well, they just want me to get by [by] passing. I mean, they don’t want me to be an A student, they just want me to pass.
I’m not gonna go [to college]. My dad didn’t go to college either. (OR11STB:200-256)

Family, peer, and teacher expectations of Joseph are similar, allowing him to move without dissonance between worlds. Joseph’s actions in school are in accord with acceptable standards of behavior—teachers believe that his academic work is up to the limits of his capability, they perceive him as pleasant and agreeable, and they view his active participation in school sports as evidence of his involvement. Further, Joseph has specific plans for the future that include definite occupational goals, well in line with culturally acceptable work patterns. His counselor and some of his teachers know Joseph’s older brother (who also attended Canyon) and his parents, who participate in school affairs by attending parent conferences and sporting events. They describe Joseph as “coming from a really nice, supportive family.” Joseph is not a student teachers worry about.

Type II: Different Worlds/Border Crossings Managed

For some students, family, peer, or school worlds are different (with respect to culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or religion), thereby requiring adjustment and reorientation as movement between contexts occurs. For example, a student’s family world may be dominated by an all-encompassing religious doctrine in which values and beliefs are contrary to those found in school and peer worlds. For other students, home and neighborhood are viewed as starkly different than school—particularly for students of color who are transported. And for still other students, differences between peers and family are dominant themes.

Regardless of the differences, in Type II, students’ perceptions of borders between worlds do not prevent them from managing crossings or adapting to different settings. However, this does not mean that crossings are always easy, that they are made in the same way, or that they always result in the same personal and psychic consequences. Indeed, we have uncovered three strategies students adopt to make these crossings, each associated with various emotional benefits and costs.

First, some students adapt completely, conforming to mainstream patterns of academic and social interaction while at school and hiding aspects of their home lives that might differentiate them from the majority of their peers. Frequently these students devalue or disparage aspects of their home worlds, their voices reflecting an internalization of roles and an acceptance of the status quo that some scholars refer to as “internalized oppression” (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Gaventa, 1980). As Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991) state, “Here is where the cultural and social conflicts between home and school can become a nightmare of contrasting demands that confuse or lead to rejection of the home culture or language, and even in some extreme cases to rejection of one’s own self” (p. 31).

A second strategy occurs when students adapt situationally, conforming to mainstream patterns of interaction when they are in the minority, returning to home or community patterns of interaction when with their
peers in social settings. These students do not devalue or seek to distance themselves from their different worlds, but rather, adapt as a practical matter. The students in our study who exhibit this pattern seem to suffer the least psychosocial stress. They fit in and operate successfully across a variety of social settings.

Finally, using a third strategy, some students develop a capacity to blend aspects of their different worlds, often maintaining high levels of academic achievement without hiding or devaluing the aspects of their home or community lives that differentiate them from their majority peers. These students both value and criticize aspects of their multiple worlds, drawing elements from each to create an identity that transcends conventional categories. Yet, the assertion of this transcultural identity (Rosaldo, 1989) can bring with it emotional costs as well as benefits. For in not succumbing to the normative press to fit in (in community, peer, and school worlds), these youth open themselves up for criticism from actors in their various worlds who expect adherence to social rules and expectations.

"Elvira Buenafe". Elvira Buenafe, a junior Filipina-American student at Canyon High School, illustrates the use of the first adaptation strategy vividly, as she describes her efforts to conform to mainstream patterns of academic and social interaction at school. Elvira entered Canyon High School in the spring of her 10th-grade year (the school includes grades 10 to 12) and has since maintained a 3.67 grade point average. She rises at 5:20 A.M. and, as a participant in the school district’s desegregation program, catches a bus to Canyon High School, located in an affluent, upper middle-class neighborhood almost an hour from her home. Eighty percent of Canyon students go on to college. As Elvira describes her reasons for choosing to attend this school, she illustrates her perceptions of the sociocultural and socioeconomic borders between her home in a predominantly Filipino neighborhood and Canyon High School:

Oh, they said the people were friendlier up here and the population—cause some of my friends... they get tired of seeing so many Filipinos and they want a different atmosphere so they come up here... most of the Filipino guys down south are like hoods or involved in gangs and stuff, and I don’t want that. They have long hair and when you come up here it’s a little bit more different... also down south there’s a lot of like girls that are involved in gangs too. I just get lazy cause I don’t like to do my hair a lot and lots of the girls down south, they always fix their hair every day and put on like black eyeliner. When they look at you, they just like think you’re weird or something. (OR09STA:62-85)

It’s like they live life more freely up here and that’s what I like about it—they have cars, they can go out to lunch... I just like go home to do homework. (OR09STA:766-773)

... up here for some reason it looks so much cleaner and nicer and it makes you feel happy to be here, you know? Cause I just like stand on our upper floor [of the school]—if you play softball you just look at those condos or whatever those are, it’s called New Age Living [pseudonym] and just look over there. (OR09STA:674-682)

Culture, ethnicity, and trying to work out her own place in divergent worlds are repetitive themes throughout Elvira’s interviews.

Elvira views her family and neighborhood as a rigidly bounded Filipino enclave. “There used to be some real Americans, but then they moved,” she said. As Elvira crosses the border between her home and school worlds, one of her primary objectives is not to stand out. She poignantly describes her horror of being the target of blatant discrimination because of her status as a transported student.

And well, most of the people here are friendly. There are a few that are like kind of not... I don’t know, I guess they are not willing to integrate or they don’t really want to. Sometimes I’m fine. But like, walking with a friend, there are these two guys and they’re like saying, ‘New York City, here comes de’ program.’ [referring to Elvira and her friend as transported students] I hate that, it’s like ‘Oh my God,’ and I try to ignore them but... (OR09STA:113-128)

As part of her effort to adapt, Elvira has completely disengaged herself from any involvement with her sister’s friends. Maria, who is one year younger, has chosen to attend the family’s neighborhood high school rather than participate in the district’s transportation program. According to Elvira, her sister is “into her own race” and frequently mentions hating European Americans. Many of her sister’s friends are in gangs, “two have been stabbed, another has stabbed someone.” Though peripherally interested in these events, Elvira remains distant from any involvement. I think it’s pretty interesting, but... it’s their business. It’s their
business but it’s not really my concern" (OR09STA:56–59). In order to embrace the school world at Canyon, Elvira has had to consciously separate herself from her sister’s peer group, whose values and beliefs would militate against her successful adaptation to the Canyon environment.

Although Elvira is clearly fascinated by her “clean, nice” Canyon environment, the social adjustment has been painful and difficult. Her daily transitions to and from school are characterized by dissonance, as she has few neighborhood friends who attend Canyon and has found it difficult to connect with the Canyon peer culture. When asked about friends, she replied:

... two or three people... introduced me to some of their friends and other people in my class. But... still it’s a problem because during lunch time I get lost and I don’t know who to hang around with and there [are] so many cliques... they grow up together, especially like the natives up here at Canyon. They’re just already there, cause you can sense it in most of your classes. They’re just, you know, ‘We went to so and so’s house... to a party... did you go to that party the other day?’ And ‘Guess who I saw the other day?’ (OR09STA:167–180)

Elvira feels she is an outsider to the social interactions of Canyon’s neighborhood students. To cope with her isolation, Elvira has adopted strategies to overcome the barriers she perceives. For example, finding it difficult to “hang out” at lunchtime, Elvira has joined a dance group that practices at noon. In classes, she tentatively initiates talk with peers who sit nearby. Further, interviews suggest that Elvira is an astute observer of the actions and behaviors of others, thereby enabling her to adopt styles and practice interaction patterns similar to students with whom she is attempting to connect. Although transition to the peer world at Canyon has been difficult, Elvira is slowly making progress at acquiring new friends.

Another strategy Elvira has adopted to manage the difficult crossing to this school environment is to turn her complete attention to schoolwork.

... when I do my homework or my other work, I usually put all my effort into it. So it’s kind of hard when you get a bad grade, cause other people, you know, they don’t do anything and... copy other people or whatever and they just pass with a C and they’re happy but you know I want to do better or do more. (OR09STA:62–71)

Observing Elvira in classes confirms that her attention is on her lessons. Even in classes that seem dull or in which students harass the teacher, Elvira is attentive. Elvira, having internalized norms of upward mobility, equates academic achievement with achieving her goal of crossing the socioeconomic border between her home and school communities:

[I want] a higher life, a higher status. It’s like my standards of living are higher than what my parents have. It’s like I don’t know. I guess it’s just a dream but... the ultimate would be living either in a nice little house in Hawaii, or a nice big house in Crespi [the Canyon neighborhood]. With some nice car. I don’t know what kind of car. Right now I want a Cabriolet. A white one with a white top. But I don’t really know. Crespi is the best, they’re so nice. (OR09STA:1243–1259)

The actors in Elvira’s life rarely cross the borders between her worlds. In fact, acutely uncomfortable with the differences between her worlds, Elvira expends energy to keep everyone apart. Since she has been at Canyon, her parents have visited the school twice: once to attend a dance performance, another time to attend a meeting for parents about college application procedures. On each occasion Elvira describes being nervous and uneasy. “I wondered if they would be the only Filipinos there.” Nor do the few nontransported friends Elvira has made at Canyon visit her home—she worries what they would think if they came.

Despite Elvira’s perception of the stark differences between her home and neighborhood and school, there are also similarities. For example, Elvira’s parents, as well as her teachers, expect her to achieve academically. When asked about her parents’ expectations, she replied:

Oh I guess mostly it’s like do your own things... well, not get F’s and D’s... I think they mostly expect As and Bs, ’cause that’s what I’ve been getting all along. They expect us to get grades higher, not lower, than a C... because my sister got a D in PE once and... he (my father) was so mad. (OR09STA:426–446)

... well, I don’t know, I guess they don’t know what to expect, they just want us to live a successful life, kind of like theirs. As long as we’re getting good grades. (OR09STA:335–340)

Elvira’s parents know the importance of good grades to her future education. Elvira says they ask her frequently, “Are you going to go to college?” Their hopes and expectations for her future are clear. Likewise,
Elvira’s teachers and counselor also expect that she will attend college and assist her in moving towards that goal.

There are elements in Elvira’s school and home worlds that help her to make these difficult transitions. The concern of her teachers and counselor, the positive response to her academic achievements, and an opportunity to develop an expanded vision of what is possible are helpful to Elvira. The general belief by others in the school environment, that she can and will do well, is reinforcing. Her parents’ support and expectations for her future are congruent with those of her teachers and counselors at the school. However, although Elvira’s quiet classroom manner, good grades, and nondisruptive behavior invoke positive descriptions from her teachers and counselor, no one at the school is aware of the psychic costs she experiences while crossing these borders. Indeed, some school features impede her progress. For example, Elvira’s classes are rarely structured to allow students to interact with each other. Although this type of classroom organization has not affected her grades, it certainly has not facilitated her connection with other students. Moreover, peer interaction is something Elvira would like. She emphasizes, “I want to be someplace where I’m socially accepted.”

“Carla Chávez”. Whereas Elvira adapts to different worlds by hiding those aspects of her home world that differentiate her from her peers, Carla Chavez, a Latina sophomore at Huntington High School who also manages border crossings, adopts a different strategy. Carla, who maintained a 3.5 GPA in her advanced classes through her sophomore year, conforms to mainstream patterns of interaction in classrooms where she is in the minority, and returns to typical home and community behaviors with her Latina peers in social settings, both in and out of school.

For Carla, the borders between her home and school worlds are primarily sociocultural and structural, growing out of her majority peers’ negative expectations of Latino youth and her need to rely on these same students for information about how to succeed in the school environment. Carla’s classes are dominated by European-American and Asian-American students; she is the only transported Latina female from her sophomore class enrolled across Huntington’s advanced classes. When asked about how she feels about being there she says:

Carla: Well, I kind of feel uncomfortable. Not many Mexicans and Hispanics are in those classes. And so it kind of makes me feel uncomfortable.

Interviewer: What about that makes you feel uncomfortable?

Carla: . . . they probably think of me as weird . . . [they] probably have this view that most Hispanics are dumb or something. [They] have that opinion, you know, get bad grades. So, I don’t know why I feel uncomfortable . . . . [it] means you’re not really with any other . . . many people. (RA28STD:540-562)

Because Huntington High School has no academic or personal counseling services, and because neither Carla’s mother nor her father attended college, Carla is forced to rely on her peers for academic information: how to get on a teacher’s good side, how to best complete a homework assignment, what needs to be done to prepare for the SAT, how to obtain information about college. Indeed, when Carla does receive information from her teachers about college application, she lacks the cultural capital to distinguish between good and bad advice:

Interviewer: What about in terms of getting information about college?

Carla: Mr. Cao [advanced English], I think, gives a lot of information about college, so does Mr. Quince [driver’s education] . . . they really know about colleges . . .

Interviewer: Can you tell me what kinds of things they’ve told you, that have been helpful?

Carla: . . . people ask questions, you know, what would be . . . like Trish . . . she wants to go to Stanford also [like me]. And she already has her tuition paid and everything, her parents already have the money . . . I’m all, ‘Whoa!’ And then Mr. Quince found this out, and [said] ‘Of course she’s going to get into Stanford if her parents pay, you know, up front.’ If they paid like before time? Is that true?

Interviewer: No.

Carla: No?

Interviewer: No.

Carla: He was telling us that, I don’t know if it’s true or not. He was telling us other things about which schools would be good for certain things . . . he was telling about that it’s better to go to a two-year junior college, and then switch to a regular college because they teach you the same things. He was telling us our parents probably think . . . they don’t like this because they think the people up there don’t know. ‘Oh your child goes to a junior college?’ They’ll think like that’s not as good as a regular college, and you know it’s the same thing. They teach the same thing. And, he was just telling us that kind of stuff. (RA28STD: 865-875, 894-959)
For Carla to cope with teacher and peer pressures to adapt and with her need to get information, she conforms to European-American, middle-class norms of interaction and behavior in her classes. She speaks white ("standard") English, works individually, and divorces her personal experience from her conversations with high-achieving peers:

You don’t really share your personal life with them, cause you really aren’t, you know, the culture isn’t quite [the same]. We don’t talk about that. We just talk about school or school things. We just talk about school. (RA28STD:1248–1259)

The one behavior Carla does not adopt is the ‘competition for the floor’ that characterizes many high-achieving classrooms. Most of the time she is quiet, rarely expressing her opinions. One teacher describes her as a student who is easily overlooked; "she doesn’t stand out—either as a nuisance or as a top student" (RA076ST1:38-41).

Despite the fact that she feels her heritage is devalued, Carla has maintained a positive orientation towards her Latino background. When asked how she feels about her heritage, she replies:

Well, I’m proud of it. I feel that, you know, that Latins aren’t stupid. I’d like to be one of them that could achieve something. Cause most people think that Latins aren’t ... you know, that they can’t do nothing, that they’re just going to become like in the lower class. And, I think that that’s not true. I think that everybody’s the same. You can do anything you want to. (RA28STEN:125–136)

Carla’s positive orientation toward her home world manifests itself during the school day. During her free time at school and at home, Carla spends time with her family and Mexican peers, speaking Spanish and English. Carla’s closest friend and her older brother have dropped out of school. Carla’s conversations with her Mexican friends center around neighborhood rumors and boys, rather than school. Carla says that she feels most comfortable around these friends because their values are similar to her own.

There are aspects of her home and peer worlds that assist Carla in her efforts to make transitions. For example, Carla’s friends are supportive of her academic achievement:

Carla: Well, all of my friends expect me to get ... good grades. And most of them are dropouts. They expect more from me than [from] other people.

Interviewer: Can you talk a little bit about how they would talk to you about that?
Carla: They’re 'Yeah, Carla’s going to become a doctor. We’re going to get free [health care] you know, like that. And then when I get bad grades they’re all 'Ught-uh!' (RA28STEN:602–616)

Carla’s parents also offer emotional support as she works to cross into her advanced classes:

Carla: ... they’re proud. You know, they show ... like when my grades are good, they go telling people ... 'You’re doing really good,' and telling their friends, ‘Yeah I think she’s gonna become what she wants to, she’s the only one in our family who can achieve what she wants.'

Interviewer: And how do you feel about that? When they say ‘yeah, she’s the only one in our family’?
Carla: It feels good ... I like the thought ’cause it just gives me more hope that I could become what I want. So it’s a little bit easier on me, instead of having parents who are always putting me down, all 'You’re no good' and things like that. (RA28STB:558–565, 586–599)

At the same time, Carla describes her parents as having little understanding of the difficult sociocultural and structural borders she faces as she moves into her classes:

Carla: Well, yeah, well they don’t really expect much from my brothers because they really don’t get that great of grades. But ever since I’ve been getting [good] grades they expect me to keep up with them, to get good grades. Like they can’t understand the classes are getting harder, and it’s more responsibility ... everything that I’m doing. They think that ... they don’t believe me that it does. That it gets harder, the classes, the grade as you go up.

Interviewer: Um-hmm.
Carla: Things get harder to do. You have more responsibilities. And they can’t understand that’s why my grades are dropping ... they just look at my report card and ‘Uh-huh, B’s? What happened to your A’s?’ (RA28STD:75–97)

Carla’s strategy of adapting situationally as she crosses sociocultural and structural borders between home and school aids her in achieving
Type III: Different Worlds/Border Crossings Difficult

In this category, like the former, students define their family, peer, and school worlds as distinct. They say they must adjust and reorient as they move across worlds and among contexts. However, unlike students who manage to make these adjustments successfully, these students find social transitions difficult. For example, a student may do poorly in a class where the teacher's interaction style, the students' role, or the learning activity are oppositional to what takes place within the students' peer or family worlds. Likewise, some students in this category describe their comfort and ease at school and with peers, but are essentially estranged from their parents. In these cases, parents' values and beliefs are frequently more traditional, more religious, or more constrained than those of their children, making adaptation to their home world difficult and conflictual. Still others cite the socioeconomic circumstances of their families as factors that work against their full engagement in school. A youth might have to work to help support his or her family, for example.

For youth in this type, border crossing involves friction and discomfort, and, in some cases, is possible only under particular conditions. For example, students who do well in one class may fail all others—and frequently they do not know why. Often, these students are less successful in classrooms in which norms and behaviors are not only different from, but oppositional to, those they encounter with their families and friends. This pattern often includes adolescents on the brink between success and failure, involvement and disengagement, commitment and apathy. These are some of the students for whom classroom and school climate conditions can mean the difference between staying in school or dropping out.

"Donna Carlota". Donna Carlota, a Mexican/European-American student at Huntington High School, is an example of a student who faces difficult socioeconomic and sociocultural borders in her transition to school. A fourth-generation American, and the oldest of four children in a single-parent family, Donna is working to be the first in her family to graduate from high school. Donna's mother dropped out of school in the 9th grade and has been on welfare since Donna was born; financial difficulties have been a central feature of Donna's home world throughout her high school years. For example, Donna has moved three times in the two years since 9th grade began, first to her grandmother's so that her mother could save money for Donna's younger sister's 15th birthday party, and second, to a motel when a conflict between Donna's mother and grandmother left the family homeless for two months while her mother searched for a new place to live.

Even when her living situation is stable, Donna is an example of a youth who thrives academically when the values, beliefs, expectations, and normative ways of behaving are consistent across her family, peer, and school worlds, and who disengages from school when they are not.

At home, Donna maintains a position of authority and responsibility with respect to school, the household, and her younger siblings. For example, her mother leaves many decisions related to schooling entirely to Donna (e.g., whether or not to attend school on a given day and whether or not to do homework). Overseeing her brothers' and sisters' homework assignments is also left to Donna. According to Donna, these responsibilities are indicative of the trust her mother has in her judgments. Relationships and experiences in Donna's peer world are similar to her relationship with her mother. Popular with her friends, she holds a position of leadership and responsibility in her Mexican-American peer group, often organizing outings or acting as a mediator when arguments flare. Predominant peer-group norms include helping one another and putting others' interests first.

In both Donna's family and peer worlds, emotional openness is valued. For example, according to Donna, her true friends know all there is to know about her, and she knows all there is to know about them. Family problems are not hidden, but discussed openly. The most striking aspects of Donna's peer and family worlds is the lack of separation between them. Unlike many teens, Donna is proud to be seen with her mother and her family and she treats her mother as one of her girlfriends:

"Yeah, my mom knows most of my friends, my girlfriends that is. And she'll go out with us, shopping or whatever. Like last weekend, Anita and I were going shopping and we invited my mom to go, but she was too tired. And my friends will talk to her about all sorts of things. Like my mom, you can talk to her about guys, she likes to talk about guys. She's not like a lot of parents, really strict about that. (RA52STC:285-296)

For Donna's friends, school achievement is secondary to having fun, maintaining friendships, and developing relationships with the opposite
sex. Peer expectations, such as putting others’ interests first, can negatively affect school performance. When, for example, Donna half completes a school assignment due in 20 minutes and a friend has not begun, she will neglect her own work in order to help her friend. If Donna is hurrying to class, and a friend calls out to her, she will stop to talk. Her friend’s needs outweigh the negative aspects of the tardy mark she will receive. When she is given detention, she expects the same friend to stay after school with her for several days to keep her company. When there are troubles with family and friends, Donna’s attention to her school work declines.

Overall, Donna has maintained a C average at Huntington High School, though her grades fluctuate across classes. In some of Donna’s classes, teachers encourage discussion and the sharing of ideas. In others, cooperative learning techniques are used. Donna identifies these classrooms as easy, and does well, while her teachers describe Donna as a mature and model student. In other classrooms instruction is primarily teacher centered, interaction among students is discouraged, and students are usually expected to be passive learners. Donna tends to daydream in these classes, identifies them as difficult, and does poorly academically. Further, these teachers barely recognize who she is.

There’s a lot of my teachers who tell me to keep up the good work, and they just compliment me, and tell me to keep getting good grades and stuff, which is fine. They always tell me, ‘I want you to be a good student,’ and they, a lot of them say ‘I really appreciate having you in class’ and stuff. And it’s nice. The class I’m getting an F in, he to me seems like, he doesn’t really pay attention to anybody in particular in class. It’s just a whole class, and this is math but . . . there’s really no one who could talk about him. So I don’t know what he actually means. He doesn’t look at me, and he knows when I do work, I do work, and I do listen to him. (RA52STB:1249-1268)

Donna does well in classrooms where she perceives the teacher as caring and where the norms and behaviors that characterize her family and peer worlds—group over self, listening and empathizing with others, and mediation skills—are required. In classroom contexts where these skills are not utilized and the teacher is perceived as remote, Donna’s attention shifts to peer-group concerns. In these situations, Donna finds crossing the border from peer to school worlds difficult.

There are significant features within Donna’s home and peer worlds that assist her in her efforts to cross school borders. Most important to

Donna, her mother demonstrates concern and interest in her children’s schooling and takes an active role to insure their best interests are served. For example, although the family lives outside Huntington High School’s attendance area, Donna’s mother met with and persuaded school authorities to allow both of her daughters to attend this school. She perceives Huntington’s resources and location in an upper-middle-class area as extra protection that will ensure that her children graduate from high school. Donna is well aware of her mother’s concerns.

She really wants us not to be like her. She wants us to learn from her mistakes. And they’re not really mistakes . . . she says that she doesn’t regret none of them, but she regrets not going to school . . . really, mainly, she wants us to graduate out of high school. To go out, graduate, since she didn’t really do that. She wants us to be responsible. You know, for my brothers. If someday they become fathers, she wants them to understand . . . she doesn’t want them to go and be making mistakes, making something and just walking away from it . . . most of the pressure is on me, ‘cause I’m the oldest. (RA52STB:1079-1104)

Moreover, although Donna’s peers’ expectations of friendship may run counter to her teachers’ expectations of students, Donna’s friends are opposed to school failure, which is considered shameful, rather than something to be proud of.

. . . if I get a bad grade, Anita will say ‘What’s this D, Donna? A D? Come on!’ My friends might feel like they’re low or something, but they’re not proud of getting straight F’s or nothing like that. And not all of my friends get b.d grades. Some of them get good grades. . . . You usually don’t find out that they got a bad grade unless one of them gets grounded. Then you know that report cards just came out. And also, if one of them does badly they’ll just change the subject real quick. That’s how you know they don’t want to talk about it. (RA52STC:346-375)

In short, although Donna’s peers do not rank school first in their concerns, they do support Donna in her efforts to graduate from high school. "Manuella Rios". Other students in our study are not dissimilar to Donna, though many are in more danger academically. For example, Manuella Rios, a second-generation Mexican/Filipino-American student at Maple High School in the Montevideo School District, faces psychosocial and sociocultural borders daily. Manuella has received A’s and B’s in two aca-
academic classes but is failing all the rest. Her school records through the 7th grade reveal high grades and test scores; in fact, in junior high school, Manuella was an identified gifted student. In the 8th grade Manuella's grades began to drop. In high school, they have plummeted. Involvement with peers who devalue school success and attend instead to family expectations (e.g., extended trips to Mexico to visit relatives; helping with a family business) divert her attention from school. The two classes in which Manuella has done well have been organized to promote student-student interaction. For example, in history Manuella and four other students work regularly as a group on class assignments. In this situation Manuella serves frequently as a resource to the others, and the classroom arrangement makes it unnecessary for her to make the transition from peers to a more traditional teacher-dominated environment. Further, Manuella perceives her teacher, "Mr. Castaneda," as particularly caring, concerned, interested in her personally, and capable of understanding her family pressures. "I can really talk to Mr. Castaneda," she says.

In contrast, classes that Manuella is failing are characterized by teachers who lecture, work that is often limited to reading textbook chapters and answering end-of-chapter questions, and interaction that is confined to students' responding to teacher-initiated questions. In these classes Manuella withdraws, shuts down, and tunes out. None of these teachers know that she has been successful in other classroom contexts, and they believe her failure stems from a lack of motivation and self-discipline.

**Type IV: Different Worlds/Borders Impenetrable**

For some students, the values, beliefs, and expectations are so discordant across worlds that border crossing is resisted or impossible. When border crossing is attempted, it is frequently so painful that, over time, these students develop reasons and rationales to protect themselves against further distress. In such cases, borders are viewed as insurmountable and students actively or passively resist attempts to embrace other worlds. For example, some students say that school is irrelevant to their lives. Other students immerse themselves fully in the world of their peers. Rather than moving from one setting to another, blending elements of all, these students remain constrained by borders they perceive as rigid and impenetrable.

"Sonia Gonzalez". Sonia Gonzalez, who attends Explorer High School in the Bolivar School District, typifies a student who does not cross sociocultural borders. Sonia perceives the border between her home and peer worlds and that of school as insurmountable. A second-generation American, Sonia entered school speaking Spanish. By the 5th grade she was classified as English proficient. Growing up in a Mexican barrio, Sonia has maintained her orientation toward her Mexican heritage. At home and with her friends—the majority of whom are bilingual—Spanish is the language of choice. Mexican traditions and practices are emphasized in her family and among her friends. However, there is no question that Sonia is bilingual and possesses bicultural skills. For example, her academic history through the 8th grade is relatively optimistic. During this time she earned mostly B's and C's. In high school her grades have declined—as a freshman she failed 4 out of 5 academic classes and the first semester of her sophomore year, she did not pass any.

According to Sonia, the border between her school and peer worlds became impassable when she moved into a socially prominent, female "Mexican" peer group. Sonia's peer world consists of sociocultural components fundamentally different from and opposed to those that are required both for success in school and in the wider society.

I don't know, but Mexicans are more crazier than white people. It's like we have like different kinds of thinking I guess, I don't know. Like we want to do everything, it's like they [white people] take everything slowly you know . . . and I don't know, it's just that they think about the future more and stuff. And us, you know what happens, happens. And it's just meant to happen. And it's like, we do crazy things, and we never think about the consequences that might happen.

And like white people over here in this area right here, like everything's more quiet, more serious, you know. You don't see like, it's really rare to see a teenager pregnant, it's like more Mexican and black people are the ones that come out pregnant. And you don't see like white people screwing around. And when you go to Juvenile, you never see like a white person in there, cause they have their act together and Mexicans, they just tend to screw around all the time. . . . (ES56STB:965–1032)

Expectations in Sonia's peer group include being available to give advice, listening in good times and in bad, and doing "crazy" things such as taking risks and having fun. There is an explicit recognition among group members that preschool behavior is not congruent with group norms and expected behaviors.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any of the same classes together?

**Sonia:** No, unfortunately. Well in a way it's better because if we were together we would have really screwed up. 'Cause like
when me and her get together, we just screw around all the time. And so it’s better to stay away from each other. . . . ’Cause otherwise we don’t care about school or anything when we’re together. ’Cause we have a lot of fun together. (ES56STB:234–250)

With these friends, Sonia skips classes, ignores homework, gets into trouble with school authorities, and gets involved—both as a sympathetic onlooker and as an accomplice—in the gang activity carried out by male friends.

According to Sonia, her family has little influence on her school behavior. Her relationship with her father, a production worker, is distant and antagonistic, and he has little involvement in her life. In contrast, she has a close, sisterly relationship with her mother, who was raised in an upper-middle-class family in Mexico where she graduated from high school. Sonia talks to and seeks advice from her mother about her friends, boys, and school. In turn, her mother shares her concerns about her marriage with Sonia. According to Sonia, her mother constantly urges her to raise her grades and to consider going to college. However, she is unable to assist Sonia with homework and is uncertain as to what role she should play with respect to school involvement. Sonia believes that her mother is uncomfortable crossing into the world of school because she has no knowledge of or experience with the American educational system. Because of this, most of the responsibility for seeking and getting educational assistance is Sonia’s.

Sonia sees her situation as starkly different from that of many of the students at Explorer High School who do well academically. She vividly describes the difficulty she experiences in crossing borders between her home and school worlds.

It’s really confusing. And some people that understand me, they say, ’It’s really easy, what’s wrong with you? It’s easy.’ But it’s hard, it’s hard. Probably it depends on what kind of background you have, too, ’cause if you have parents that been to college, they’ve been prepared, and they’re pretty much prepared, you pretty much have a better idea what’s going on, you like understand things better, ’cause you grew up in the kind of environment that, you know, they understand more. But if you have parents that dropped out and stuff like that, you know, it’s different, it’s harder. ’Cause you try to get help from them, you know, when you’re doing your homework. They don’t understand what you’re doing, they don’t know. And it’s hard, it’s harder. (ES56STB:795–814)

Sonia’s difficulties in crossing the sociocultural border between family and peer and school worlds are exacerbated by the fact that she has few connections to school. Her comments and our observations reveal that she has little meaningful contact with her high school teachers. According to Sonia, she has never had a teacher who spoke adamantly about the successes and strengths of Mexican culture, or who spoke to her personally about her future. Further, she believes that her teachers communicate negative images about her ethnic identity:

White teachers, some of them are kind of prejudiced. It’s probably the way they look at you, the way they talk, you know, when they’re talking about something, like when they talk about the people who are going to drop out. And Mr. Kula, when he’s talking about teenage pregnancy or something like that, he turns around and looks at us [Sonia and her Mexican female friends]. It’s like, he tries to look around the whole room, so we won’t notice, but like he mostly like tries to tell us, tries to get it through our heads, you know. (ES56STB:1884–1911)

Sonia also perceives little support and even direct hostility from her non-Mexican peers. Her statements reflect the intense discomfort she feels in classes without her friends.

’Cause you feel uncomfortable in a class that, you know, where there [are] practically no Mexicans in there. So nobody you can talk to. And then the people in there, they’re like really stuck up, you know. It makes me uncomfortable to be in that class ’cause they’re like, you feel like they’re talking about you or something. It’s uncomfortable ’cause they’re like stuck up, they don’t like talking to you. You might say hi or hello and sometimes they don’t answer back. And that’s why I don’t like them, you know. (ES56STB:855–874)

Sonia’s description illuminates her feelings of being an outsider. There appear to be few features in her classes that operate to pull her in and ensure her inclusion as a respected and valuable member of the group. Further, none of her teachers are aware of the intense discomfort she feels. Security, acceptance, and a strong sense of belonging characterize Sonia’s involvement in her peer world. These qualities are not replicated in the world of school. And why would Sonia risk jeopardizing her close friendships to embrace a school world that she perceives as hostile and cold? The combination of peer-group norms that devalue behaviors asso-
ciated with academic success and school features that fail to address her individual needs create insurmountable borders.

"Jeffrey Hoffman". Students who describe borders as impenetrable also include those unable to cross into the worlds of peers or family. For example, Jeffrey Hoffman, a European-American student at Huntington High School, describes his experience of the psychosocial border between school and peers. "At school I really don't have any friends," says Jeffrey. Alienated from peers in his school environment, Jeffrey describes how difficult it is to concentrate on academics when all he can think about is how isolated he feels. Jeffrey's low grades (and high test scores) are indicative of his inability to focus on school. However, during his first semester at Huntington, Jeffrey went to a peer counselor who encouraged him to participate in Huntington's drama program. Jeffrey has subsequently become actively involved, not only in drama but also in peer counseling. These programs have helped Jeffrey make some friends but his standing with peers remains tenuous. Most of Jeffrey's teachers are unaware of the difficulties he faces—others do not consider the educational implications of his inability to transition to a peer world. For example, Jeffrey's science teacher directed students to work together in groups but did not notice that Jeffrey sat quietly alone.

Other students in this type perceive demarcated borders between peer and family worlds. In these situations, conflicts are frequently acute and students' energies and attention are diverted from engagement in learning. Locked in conflict with their families, these students see school involvement as extraneous to the other pressures in their lives.

REFLECTIONS: BORDER CROSSING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents a model for thinking about the interrelationship of students' family, peer, and school worlds and in particular, how they combine to affect students' engagement with schools and learning. We have generated a typology to illustrate patterns of movement and adaptation strategies students use as they move between worlds and interact in different contexts and social settings. Although each of the four types contain variety with respect to students' perceptions, there are nevertheless some common themes.

In our sample, most of the students who describe congruent worlds and smooth transitions (Type I) are members of two-parent families that place a high value on family cohesiveness. Family values include an orientation towards the future, academic achievement or doing the "best one can," and conformity to acceptable standards of behavior. These students' friends reinforce the value of effort with respect to school, sports, and work. Further, the actors in their lives move across the boundaries of their worlds—friends go to each other's homes and are in the same classes at school. Parents attend school events (e.g., sports, drama) and participate in teacher conferences and parent organizations. It is well known by teachers, either personally or through word of mouth, that parents support teachers' efforts and are available if problems should arise.

Teachers frequently feel comfortable with these students, for they do not cause problems and rarely exhibit behaviors that are worrisome. Further, teachers perceive these students as being on the right track. For example, one of Ryan's teachers described him as "programmed for success." Other teachers, however, express concern that these "well-adjusted and successful" students are the ones who are forgotten. And in fact, we have found that these students frequently express tremendous pressures—anxiety about the future, living up to the expectations of those around them, maintaining high grades.

Further, students who are secure and comfortable within the bounds of their congruent worlds may have an especially difficult time connecting with peers unlike themselves. Many have little opportunity or reason to practice or acquire border crossing strategies. Distanced from students in other groups, it is these students who are particularly at risk for developing spurious ideas and stereotypes about others. Some of these students are not interested in getting to know or working or interacting with students who achieve at different levels or who have different backgrounds. Constantly reinforced for their "on-track" behaviors, they can be quick to denigrate divergent actions by others. In a sense, their view is limited and bounded by the congruency of their worlds.

Students whose worlds are different but manage to successfully traverse borders (Type II) are, like the previous students, are often overlooked by their teachers. They too present few problems—they appear to fit in, and their behavior is in accord with acceptable classroom and school norms. Nevertheless, these students are frequently an enigma to their teachers, who have no knowledge of their families or the reasons for their success. Their invisibility as individuals is illuminated by teacher descriptions that expose the lack of even the most fundamental knowledge about students' backgrounds.

Even though many students are able to cross perceived borders successfully, they are frequently forced to deny aspects of who they are. This is illuminated by these youths' efforts to keep the actors in their worlds separate, and the tremendous discomfort they feel when unable to do so. Because teachers view these students as "well-adjusted," the conflicts and
difficulties they feel can be overlooked or discounted as unimportant. Teachers' relief that students "fit in," do well academically, and present few problems precludes their attention to important aspects of individuals' lives, for example, the energy and effort required to navigate different worlds successfully.

Students whose worlds are different, and who cross borders only under certain conditions (Type III), often teeter between engagement and withdrawal (whether with family, school, or friends). For youth whose family and peer worlds stand in contrast to that of the school, academic success occurs sporadically. In classrooms where students flourish, teachers know the students well, are attuned to their needs, and show personal concern for their lives. These teachers are aware of their students' precarious academic status and incorporate various pedagogical methods to ensure student involvement. In classrooms where students do poorly, teachers often classify them as overall low achievers and are unaware of their successes. For example, Manuela's math teacher, in whose class she had spent five hours a week for almost a full academic year, did not know who she was. Low expectations and pessimism about students' abilities characterize these teachers' views. Blame for students' failures is placed on students' personal characteristics or forces outside the school, for example, the students' family or peers. These teachers rarely suspect that classroom features, pedagogical style, or their own attitudes may powerfully influence students' ability to succeed and connect with the school environment.

Finally, students who describe borders as impenetrable (Type IV) say that attempts to embrace other worlds create stress and anxiety. As a result, these students gravitate toward situations where support is found and away from circumstances that exacerbate their discomfort. For example, students alienated from school may turn their attention to peers. Or students like Jeffrey, who are alienated from peers, spend time with extended family members. However, the inability of these students to cross borders does not necessarily imply that they are completely opposed to school. Students who view the differences between family or peers and school as unbridgeable say that classroom and school climate features do not support their needs. In fact, they frequently describe instances of insensitivity or hostility from teachers and other students that threaten their personal integrity or devalue their background circumstances (e.g., religious or cultural). Many voice a desire to obtain the skills necessary to cross successfully into the school environment.

The multiple worlds model has important implications for schools and learning. Perhaps most significant, it provides teachers and others a way of thinking about students in a more holistic way. Further, the model suggests a focus for educators as they think about school features that impact students' lives. From data gathered during the Students' Multiple Worlds Study, it appears that in our culture many adolescents are left to navigate transitions without direct assistance from persons in any of their contexts, most notably the school. Further, young people's success in managing these transitions varies widely. Yet students' competence in moving between settings has tremendous implications for the quality of their lives and their chances of using the educational system as a steppingstone to further education, productive work experiences, and a meaningful adult life. In order to create environments where students are able to work together in classrooms, to solve problems jointly, and to have an equal investment in schools and learning, we need to identify institutional structures that eliminate borders without requiring young people to give up or hide important features of their lives. This requires more than understanding other cultures. It means that students must acquire skills and strategies to work comfortably and successfully in divergent social settings and with people different than themselves.

NOTES

1. This is a revised edition of an article originally published in Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 22(3), September 1991.
2. Our use of the term world corresponds closely to Spradley and McCurdy's (1972) definition of cultural scene. Likewise, the terms social settings, arenas, and context in this study parallel their definition of social situations (pp. 25-50).
3. As Erickson (1987) notes, the distinction between cultural borders and boundaries was made initially by Barth (1969) and has also been discussed in terms of schooling by McDermott and Gospodinoff (1979) and Erickson and Bekker (1986).
4. Ruth Benedict's (1938) observation over 50 years ago—that American institutions provide inadequate support in helping young people progress from one role to another—continues to have relevance today. She states, "... adult activity demands traits that are interdicted in children, and that far from redoubling efforts to help children bridge this gap, adults in our culture put all the blame on the child when he fails to manifest spontaneously the new behavior or, overstepping the mark, manifests it with untoward belligerence" (p. 432).
5. Although Huntington High School was selected originally because of its relatively stable student population, during the course of this study the minority student population has increased to approximately 50%. Nineteen percent of these students are eligible to participate in the district's transportation program.
6. Although gender borders are certainly present in the schools in which