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SUBTRACTIVE SCHOOLING

U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring

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It almost seemed, maybe I'm wrong, like the teachers didn't want to know us, or too much about us. I try to be fair. Maybe it was like the more they knew us, the more they'd be responsible and their problems were so big, big! What would it mean in that situation to genuinely care for us? It would mean caring for big problems. And, not to let anybody off the hook, but who of all of them was ready or willing to take on a cause for *raza* [the Mexican American people]? (Junior female who walked out and eventually graduated from another high school)

The walkout was about caring. We cared for our education though the teachers and administration didn't care for us. Even if they said they cared, talk is cheap. If it wasn't their fault the school was in such trouble—and they'll tell you that, clean their hands—it was their responsibility no matter what. *Todos, todos* [All, all], they were all to blame. (Freshman male student who walked out and eventually dropped out of school, took his G.E.D. and enrolled in a community college)

CHAPTER 3

Teacher-Student Relations and the Politics of Caring

This chapter examines competing definitions of caring at Seguin. The predominantly non-Latino teaching staff sees students as not sufficiently *caring about* school, while students see teachers as not sufficiently *caring for* them. Teachers expect students to demonstrate caring about schooling with an abstract, or *aesthetic* commitment to ideas or practices that purportedly lead to achievement. Immigrant and U.S.-born youth, on the other hand, are committed to an *authentic* form of caring that emphasizes relations of reciprocity between teachers and students.

Complicating most teachers' demands that students care about school is their displeasure with students' self-representations, on the one hand, and the debilitating institutional barriers they face on a daily basis that impede their abilities to connect effectively with youths' social world, on the other. From these adults' perspective, the way youth dress, talk, and generally deport themselves "proves" that they do not care about school. For their part, students argue that they should be assessed, valued, and engaged as whole people, not as automatons in baggy pants. They articulate a vision of education that parallels the Mexican concept of *educación*. That is, they prefer a model of schooling premised on respectful, caring relations. As discussed in chapter 1, *educación* closely resembles Noddings' (1988) concept of authentic caring which views sustained reciprocal relationships between teachers and students as the basis for all learning.

Noddings (1984, 1992) argues that teachers' ultimate goal of apprehending their students' subjective reality is best achieved through engrossment in their students' welfare and emotional displacement. That is, authentically caring teachers are seized by their students and energy flows toward their projects and needs.

The benefit of such profound relatedness for the student is the development of a sense of competence and mastery over worldly tasks. In the absence of such connectedness, students are not only reduced to the level of objects, they may also be diverted from learning the skills necessary for mastering their academic and social environment. Thus, the difference in the way students and teachers perceive school-based relationships can bear directly on students' potential to achieve.

The landscape of caring orientations among teachers and immigrant and U.S.-born students at Seguí is presented in the following pages. A mutual sense of alienation evolves when teachers and students hold different understandings about school. Because teachers and administrators are better positioned than students to impose their perspective, aesthetic caring comes to shape and sustain a subtractive logic. That is, the demand that students embrace their teachers' view of caring is tantamount to requiring their active participation in a process of cultural and linguistic eradication (Bartolomé 1994) since the curriculum they are asked to value and support is one that dismisses or derogates their language, culture, and community. (See chapter 5 for an elaboration of the culturally subtractive elements of schooling.) Rather than building on students' cultural, linguistic, and community-based knowledge, schools like Seguí typically subtract these resources. Psychic and emotional withdrawal from schooling are symptomatic of students' rejection of subtractive schooling and a curriculum they perceive as uninteresting, irrelevant, and test-driven.

Immigrant youth resemble their disaffected, U.S.-born counterparts when they, too, become "uncaring" after having acculturated and become "Americanized" too rapidly. However, because the "uncaring" student prototype is overwhelmingly U.S.-born, they are the primary focus here. With their experiences of psychic and emotional withdrawal within the regular track, these teenagers demand with their voices and bodies, even more strongly than do their immigrant peers, a more humane vision of schooling. Since their critique of the aesthetic-caring status quo is sometimes lodged in acts of resistance—not to education, but to schooling—school officials typically misinterpret the meaning of these challenges.

A look at the consequences for youth when their teachers do

or do not initiate relationships reveals how a sense of connectedness can have a direct impact on success at school. After a closing discussion of the limitations of both aesthetic and authentic caring as currently conceptualized in the literature, a peek at Seguí's Social Studies Department provides insights into the relation between caring and pedagogy. The chapter concludes with an account of Seguí's highly successful band teacher. This teacher's embodiment of authentic caring, including his apprehension of Seguí students' cultural world and structural position, demonstrates the enormous benefits that accrue when schooling is transformed into education—or more appropriately, *educación*.

TEACHER CARING

The view that students do not care about school stems from several sources, including social and cultural distance in student-adult relationships and the school culture itself. Most of the school's staff neither live nor participate in their students' predominantly Mexican community. The non-Latino teachers who constitute the majority (81 percent) are doubtful and even defensive about the suggestion that more Latino teachers would make a difference in school climate. Seguí's high attrition rate—particularly among the newer staff (see chapter 2)—further exacerbates social distance and increases the difficulty of developing an explicit ethic of caring.

Some schools have consciously articulated an ethic of authentic caring (e.g., see Danin's [1994] ethnography of one such school), but no such effort has ever been deliberately undertaken at Seguí. Except for a minority of teachers for whom aesthetic and authentic caring are not mutually exclusive, a more general pattern of aesthetic caring prevails among those who teach the "middle majority" of regular-track youth.

In my many conversations with teachers, only a few indicated that they knew many of their students in a personal way, and very few students said that they thought that their teachers knew them or that they would be willing to go to their teachers for help with a personal problem. This is not surprising. Despite perceiving of themselves as caring, many teachers unconsciously communicate

a different message—to their colleagues as well as to their students. Committed teachers who invest their time in students are chided for their efforts, with the reminder that working hard is not worth the effort “since these kids aren’t going anywhere anyway.” The subtext is more damning still: Seguin students don’t “go anywhere” because they don’t, can’t, or won’t “try.”

Teachers sometimes make this view explicit. Consider the case of Mr. Johnson, English teacher and self-proclaimed student advocate. Mr. Johnson is openly critical of the counselors and the administration for their sustained incompetence in handling students’ course schedules. No doubt, Mr. Johnson does rescue some students from bureaucratic harm, but his good deeds are nullified by his abrasive and overbearing behavior in the classroom. As the following description of his teaching style shows, this teacher’s apparent need to feel and be powerful cuts him off from the very individuals he seems to believe he is helping—or trying to help.

One sunny day in April when I am observing in Mr. Johnson’s ninth-grade English classroom, I hear him say to his class—yet somehow I know his comments are for my benefit—in a loud, deep, Southern drawl, “The main problem with these kids is their attitude. They’re immature and they challenge authority. Look at them, they’re not going anywhere. I can tell you right now, a full quarter of these students will drop out of school come May.”

One of the girls sitting right in front of Mr. Johnson smiles awkwardly and rolls her eyes in apparent disgust. Most students simply pretend not to hear him, though a few glance at me and chuckle nervously in embarrassment. The teacher sounds like he is joking but the students do not find him funny.

“See what I mean?” Mr. Johnson says. “They think they can get by in life without having to take orders from anyone.”

A student slumped in his chair with his chin and arms on his desk peers up, then lifts his head, responding in a mumble, “Aw, Mr. Johnson, you don’t . . . you’re just. . . .”

Mr. Johnson interrupts, “Joel, stop thinking, you know it might hurt you, cause you some damage upstairs.”

Joel smiles wryly and sinks back into his chair.

As extreme as Mr. Johnson’s behavior may seem, teachers at Seguin often engage in such verbal abuse. He communicates—perhaps more vividly than most—a sentiment shared by teachers

and other school personnel, namely that Mexican students are immature, unambitious, and defiant of authority, and that teachers have no power to change the situation since it is the students’ fault. The school’s obvious systemic problems, most evident in its astronomical dropout rate, are brushed aside and the burden of responsibility and the struggle for change is understood as rightfully residing first with the students, their families, and the community. A lack of urgency about the school’s academic crisis itself is a sign of dangerously low expectations on the part of Seguin teachers and administrators.

Mr. Johnson articulated this belief that students’ academic performance is primarily a matter of individual initiative and motivation when he introduced me to his class. Much to my chagrin, he patronizingly informed his students that I was a “doctor” from Rice University and then added, “Something y’all could be if you just stopped your foolishness and grew up.” I could feel myself staring back at the students with the same disappointed and humiliated look that they were giving me.

During this entire interaction, students were passively sitting in their seats instead of working on the *Romeo and Juliet* writing assignment scribbled boldly on the chalkboard. So Mr. Johnson was accurate in one respect: they were challenging his ability to make them learn under abusive conditions. However, Mr. Johnson and other teachers conveniently overlook the fact that they do have sway in the classroom. In this case, for instance, no student showed outright anger, despite the tension in the air. Students were clearly deferring to his authority, thus demonstrating, ironically, the fallacy in the teacher’s view. More importantly, they exhibited extraordinary self-control, hardly what one would expect from youth who are inherently “immature” and “defiant.” That the students were, in fact, restraining themselves was made dramatically clear to me later when I spoke with Joel outside the classroom. Summing up his feelings toward his English teacher, Joel exploded, “Johnson’s full of shit! . . . he’s always got an attitude.”

The bias most mainstream teachers have toward the majority of Seguin students arises from many sources. Mainly white and middle-class, these adults’ more privileged backgrounds inevitably set them up for disappointment in youth whose life cir-

cumstances differ so radically from their own. Students' failure to meet their teachers' expectations is further complicated by a generational divide. Like most adults, teachers misremember the past as a golden era; they recall a time when everyone was "honest," when old and young alike "worked hard," when school was "important," and students were "respectful." Some days, the teachers' lounge could easily be confused with the set of a daytime TV episode, as teachers exchange comments like, "My father was poor and he worked hard for everything he earned"; "When I was young, things were different"; "Where I grew up, if you raised your voice"; and "I never even thought once that I shouldn't go to class." Without exception, the school's most dedicated teachers avoid the lounge altogether, fearing the disabling potential of their colleagues' negativity. Contemporary students, in failing to conform to this misty, mythical image of their historical counterparts, seem deficient, so teachers find it hard to see them in an appreciative, culture-affirming way.

Moreover, teachers see the differences in culture and language between themselves and their students from a culturally chauvinistic perspective that permits them to dismiss the possibility of a more culturally relevant approach in dealing with this population. For instance, teachers and counselors more often lament their students' linguistic limitations than they do their own. An affirming stance toward Mexican culture is deemed unnecessary since, as one teacher on Seguin's Shared Decision-Making (SDM) Committee explained to me, "the school is already 'all-Mexican.'"

The interrelationship between the tendency to objectify students and the rejection of a nurturing view of education is clear in everyday classroom experiences at Seguin. An algebra teacher who appears to have little success in maintaining an orderly atmosphere in her class perceives rowdiness as evidence that many youth are not in school to learn. She complained to me one day, "I'm not here to baby-sit and I'm certainly not their parent. . . . I finally told them, 'Listen, you don't have to be here if you don't want to be here. No one's forcing you.'" Teachers often give students the option of remaining in or leaving the classroom. Typically they justify their actions by saying that they are trying to inculcate a sense of adult responsibility in these teenage boys

and girls. At issue here is the means by which youth acquire a sense of adult responsibility. When uttered in the absence of authentic caring, such language objectifies students as dispensable, nonessential parts of the school machinery.

Another dismissive expression that has prompted repeated complaints from PTA members involves teachers unilaterally rejecting students who have been assigned to already overcrowded classrooms at the beginning of each semester. As addressed in the previous chapter, chaos always characterizes the first several weeks of each new year. The school's ten to twelve counselors have the demonstrably impossible task of processing over a thousand new entrants, emanating from the feeder middle schools, from other area high schools, and from outside the state or country. If the sheer size of this incoming tide were not enough to ensure the counselors' failure, the additional fact that they do not begin processing *any* students' fall schedules until the week before school opens would settle the matter. With so little time to process so many students, the counselors resort to simply overassigning them to classes. The rationale for this deliberate mischeduling is, predictably, purely bureaucratic: this is the easiest way to get students "into the system" so that they may be counted as enrolled. Interestingly, there is no district policy that states that youth must be enrolled by any particular day.

In a "good" year, counselors "level off" these classes by the third week of school when most students' schedules are finally "fixed"—that is, when students are assigned to the classes they should have been enrolled in from the first day of school. As might be expected, the first few weeks are extremely stressful. Teachers face huge classes composed of a random mix of students, only some of whom belong where they are. Even larger than the actual classes are the rosters of students who are supposedly present in their classrooms. Massively long class rosters, teachers' and students' conflictual relations with counselors, extraordinarily large class sizes despite absent and disappearing bodies, insufficient numbers of desks, books, teaching materials and space, combine with students' displeasure over schooling to make for a state of high tension and intense normlessness.

Regarding counselors, teachers see them as incompetent and overly bureaucratic, while students begin each semester with the

sense that “the system,” including counselors, exhibits precious little concern for them. In fact, in the fall 1995 semester, several Latino and white teachers grew so disgusted with the counselors that they appropriated a sense of leadership that they did not see operating within the school’s administration by usurping the student assignment process from the counselors, superseding the principal’s authority. Their actions created even greater havoc. The assignment process turned out not to be as simple as it seemed and relations between teachers and counselors were polarized for awhile. Fortunately, a cadre of Seguí parents and community activists mobilized to make Seguí accountable for the chaos that had developed. With community members participating, working groups formed and by the seventh week of the semester, a modicum of equanimity evolved.¹

Among the handful of teacher leaders in this revolt, what became apparent was their own sense of authentic caring as markedly contrasting with their view of counselors’ penchant for aesthetic caring. Accordingly, one teacher leader said to me, “Yes, things got confused, but we wanted to do what was right for our kids. We’re the ones who have to experience the effects of their [counselors’] actions.” These teachers’ moral authority came from their status as effective classroom teachers as well as from their personal involvement on the school’s central committees. Not surprisingly, one was also the social studies teacher who empowered her students with the skills and understandings they needed to carry out the October 1989 protest in a peaceful, non-violent manner. Hence, despite the confusion their actions created, the constructive dialogue and decisions that resulted would probably not have occurred had matters not indeed grown worse.

Personnel changes in Seguí’s administration have made it difficult for principals and assistant principals to make any sustainable progress in improving the efficiency with which the school is run. Nor have they been able to alter the school’s culture. Assistant Principal Ana Luera, who by her third year at Seguí had become significantly involved in working toward changing the school’s culture, maintains that changing counselors’ and teachers’ practices is a long process that requires both patience and perseverance. Most importantly, she notes that no change can occur in the absence of mutual respect and trust:

You can’t do anything with them [teachers and counselors] your first couple of years because you have to gain their trust. They’re just like kids. You have to show you love them. . . . Now, by the third year . . . you don’t know *how many* teachers I called in to tell them to show more respect to the students, to not do certain things. Now that I got their trust, I can tell them. Sometimes they deny what they do or they admit it and say that they won’t do it again. I respect them and I give them due process. You have to do that. . . . This year, we’re going to do some cultural sensitivity training. . . . Students’ schedules were also fixed this time at the end of the school year . . . you just can’t do anything as a new principal the first couple of years.

Luera reveals the need for teachers to feel cared for. As Noblit (1994) similarly found in his case study of a caring principal in a school, principals can assert their leadership by authentically caring for teachers and also by promoting honest dialogue on how to authentically care for students. The brief tenures of principals is a widespread problem in urban schools throughout the state of Texas. In addition to “burnout,” the district loses principals by adhering to an accountability scheme that makes the tenure of a principal’s assignment contingent on raising students’ test scores on a statewide exam within a three-year time period.² One unintended consequence of this “revolving door” approach to posting principals is that it reinforces counselors’ and teachers’ sense of autonomy and increases their power. In a system where they are the “old hands,” they must be continually “won over” by top administrators whose jobs may be hostage to their subordinates’ willingness to cooperate.

The intransigence of teacher and counselor culture at Seguí has other consequences besides potentially undermining the efforts of a new principal. Parents, PTA members, and community advocates whose appeals to Seguí staff are routinely dismissed without serious consideration frequently resort to bypassing the school and carrying their concerns directly to the district superintendent or the school board. According to one PTA leader, the highly predictable surplus of students enrolling each semester relative to spaces available is tolerated because school staff know “that the students will drop out anyway by the fifth or sixth week of classes.” Enrollments of between 3,000 and 3,400 each

semester in a physical facility capable of housing no more than 2,600 students lend credence to this claim. And not surprisingly, the numbers do substantially trim down in a five- to six-week time frame. A small, nearby alternative high school serving approximately 150 students annually—itsself a remnant of the 1970 school boycott—rejects an average of 7 students per day who are attempting to re-enroll in school after having “dropped out.” Unfortunately, Seguin does not keep records on such students’ whereabouts.

Teachers occupy an uncomfortable middle ground. They are both victims of and collaborators with a system that structurally neglects Latino youth. Armed with limited classroom materials and often outdated equipment and resources, and facing large classes overflowing with overage, at-risk, and underachieving youth, teachers frequently opt for efficiency and the “hard line” over a more humanistic approach. The district’s emphasis on quantitative measures and “accountability” to evaluate students’ commitment to school streamlines some aspects of teaching, but at the same time alienates scores of marginalized students. As the distance between teachers and their students widens, any possibility of an alliance between the two evaporates. Isolated from and unhappy with one another, neither party finds much to call rewarding about a typical day at Seguin High School.

Students who say and act like they do not care about school mystify teachers; the latter profess great difficulty understanding such attitudes. The possibility that an uncaring attitude might be a coping strategy or a simple facade has little currency among Seguin teachers. My interactions and conversations with students, on the other hand, suggest that youth who maintain that they don’t care about school may often really mean something else. For example, there are many students like Susana, a young woman with a fragile academic self-concept who takes comfort in the thought that she does not really care about learning in school. She protects herself from the pain of possibly failing to do well by choosing to do poorly. My investigation of Susana’s withdrawn attitude (described below) supports, albeit negatively, the caring literature’s hypothesized relationship between the teacher’s apprehension of the student and the sense of academic competence and mastery that should ensue.

Mrs. Hutchins, a ninth-grade English teacher, asked me to talk to Susana to find out why she refused to answer when called upon in the classroom. I can only guess that Ms. Hutchins enlisted my assistance because she perceived my ethnicity as a possible route into Susana’s world. “She always makes faces when I call on her,” Mrs. Hutchins said, explaining her request. Then, she offered a theory about the reasons for Susana’s behavior. “She doesn’t want to be in my class. She may even resent me somehow.” Mrs. Hutchins had introduced problem-solving techniques into her teaching, but she said that certain students still seemed beyond reach. When she first started teaching at Seguin, her fellow teachers cautioned her that there were many such students. After two years of teaching, she felt she had to get to the bottom of the problem of mentally absent students.

I was able to approach Susana as she was settling into her desk just before the bell sounded on the following day. I complimented her on the length and beauty of her jet-black, braided hair and told her I was a researcher studying what students think about school. Susana briefly let down her guard. We exchanged a few words about what researchers do and she told me that when she had seen me the day before she couldn’t tell whether I was a teacher or a student. She became sufficiently interested in our conversation, enough to upbraid a young man who was trying to get her attention. She told him to “Shut up!” because she was busy right then.

I told her that I noticed many students who did not participate in classroom discussions when teachers asked them to, and I wanted to know what she thought about that. She took a deep breath and said, seriously, “You kinda’ have to seem like you don’t care because if you say something, and it comes out sounding stupid, then everybody will say you’re dumb. And even the teacher will think you’re dumb, when they didn’t think that before.” While Susana may sound unusually protective of her ego, her thinking is quite logical, inverting the relation of authentic caring and academic competence: a dearth of authentic relations with teachers subtracts, or minimizes, opportunities youth have to develop and enjoy a sense of competence and mastery of the curriculum.

My discussion with Susana further revealed that her com-

portment toward her history teacher was a generalized response to schooling based on several past negative experiences with teachers.

"I've had some bad things happen to me with teachers," she confided.

"Like what?" I asked, just as the bell rang.

"Oh, lots of things," she said, sneering and pulling backwards as if not wanting to elaborate.

Feeling that I was losing her and that our conversation was about to end, I took a chance and asked, "Has anyone ever made you feel like what you said in class was dumb?"

"Oh yeah, but not anymore. Na-ah, not me."

Susana's, withdrawn, defensive posture was most fully revealed in the following statement, which ended our conversation:

Once this bad science teacher asked me in front of everybody to stop raising my hand so much in class. And all the students laughed at me. I was trying to learn and he was a new teacher . . . hard to understand. I felt so stupid . . . so yeah, that and other things. . . . Teachers say that they want to talk to you, but I notice that they really don't. I used to get mad about it, but now it's like "What's the use?" Not gonna change nuthin'. If I can just make it through the day without no problems. . . . So now if something bad happens, I know that I didn't cause it cuz I'm just here mindin' my business.

Teachers' repeated threats to Susana's academic self-concept have made her lower her expectations about the likelihood of forming productive relationships with teachers. As she was open with me, my guess is that Susana is not yet entirely lost because she hasn't quite given up. Later, when I shared what I had learned about Susana with Mrs. Hutchins, the teacher expressed a mixture of frustration, annoyance, and grief over the thought of having to deal with the consequences of Susana's previous teachers' mistakes and insensitivities.

"As if teaching were not enough to preoccupy myself with," she sighed, and then continued in a more defensive tone, "It's overwhelming to think that this is the level we're dealing at, and frankly, neither was I trained nor am I paid to be a social worker."

"Well, at least you know more of what you're up against in this situation," I offered.

"Yeah, I suspected this would be the case and it's uncomfortable for me to deal with someone who is hard set with the idea that teachers are the enemy."

Clearly, in this case both student and teacher resist a caring relationship. The effects of this mutual resistance are not equally balanced, however. Mrs. Hutchins may have to continue to put up with the distraction of funny faces rather than the positive classroom participation she would like, but Susana's adjustment will be much more costly. As her sense of alienation gets reinforced, her willingness to remain even marginally mentally engaged will steadily erode.

The individual histories that students and teachers bring to their classroom encounters necessarily influence the chances for successful relationship building. Still, in most cases, there is likely to be some room to maneuver—that is, if the situation is approached literally "with care." However unintended, the story of Mrs. Hutchins and Susana captures a teacher in the very process of closing the door to relationship by privileging the technical over the expressive. Notwithstanding her expressed desire to get at the root of Susana's problem, Mrs. Hutchins' rather self-absorbed, emotional response reveals the limitations of her aesthetic framework. In a contradictory fashion, she is angry with Susana's previous teachers' mistakes at the same time that she resists pursuing a possible solution through the alternative route implied within Susana's schooling experiences—that is, a more relational and compassionate pedagogy.

Fine (1991) provides reasons for the technical, aesthetic focus of schools that resonate with this study, in general, and with this teacher's response, in particular. Fine's investigation of dropouts, undertaken in a comprehensive, inner-city school similar to Seguin, leads her to conclude that teachers are committed to an institutional "fetish" that views academics as the exclusive domain of the school. This fetish supports the status quo by preserving the existing boundaries between the ostensibly "public" school and the "private" matters of family and community. Though Susana's problems appear related to the schooling process itself, Mrs. Hutchins observes that she was not trained to be

a social worker as an implicit justification for her refusal to pursue Susana's situation any further. Such reasoning is persuasive only if one first accepts as real—and right—the hypothesized public-private dichotomy in the realm of education.

When real-life concerns are thrust into the classroom, many teachers find themselves in uncomfortable and disorienting positions. They may be called on not only to impart their expert knowledge, but also to deal with barriers to students' learning of which they may not be fully aware or trained to recognize. If and when they do become aware of these contingencies, time and skill constraints remain. When teaching effectiveness gets reduced to methodological considerations and when no explicit culture of caring is in place, teachers lose the capacity to respond to their students as whole human beings and schools become uncaring places (Kozol 1991; Bartolomé 1994; Prillaman and Eaker 1994). These are conditions under which teachers and administrators may turn resolutely to face-saving explanations for school-based problems. Rather than address the enormity of the issues before them, they take solace in blanket judgments about ethnicity and underachievement or "deficit" cultures that are allegedly too impoverished to value education.

These kinds of explanations are often embedded in a larger framework that co-identifies underachievement and students' dress, demeanor, and friendship choices. The tendency to place the onus of students' underachievement on the students themselves has been amply observed in other ethnographic research among youth in urban schools (Peshkin 1991; Fine 1991; Orenstein 1994; Yeo 1997; Olsen 1997; McQuillan 1998). Collective problems are regularly cast in individual terms, as if asymmetrical relations of power were irrelevant. Not weighed against individual students' proclivities are the larger structural features of schooling that subtract resources from youth (see chapter 5), preempting a fair rendering of the parameters of low educational mobility. This absence of a self-critical discourse unwittingly promotes condescending views toward students, as the following incident reveals.

On an overcast winter afternoon a counselor named Mr. Ross and I stand guard by a steel exit door. The final afternoon bell has rung and students begin pouring out of the building. A seemingly

endless river of brown faces and bodies pressing against each other spews forth out of several narrow exit doors into the school's muddied and rapidly vanishing front lawn. A group of three boys tumble by us, jostling one another and calling each other "*putos*" (whores) and "bitches." I catch a glimpse of the elastic top band of Fruit of the Loom underwear as one boy tries to knock another down. Mr. Ross shakes his head in disapproval as the boys scurry off with mischievous grins on their faces. The counselor turns to me and confesses that he just cannot understand why Latino youth "do not take school seriously":

I'm just amazed all the time at how much these kids skip and mess around instead of doing their school work. It's different in the black community. It's like you grow up expecting to graduate from high school. It's never a question of whether you're going to go or not. You just go. . . . I try to help these Hispanic kids. I tell them, "Hey, this is the only time anything in your life is going to be free, so take advantage of it." But, you can only lead a horse to water . . . if they don't want to be here, what can you do?

Mr. Ross' analysis fails to consider the disempowering nature of the school's curriculum. Questions of equity persist: entitlement to a "free" public education does not automatically translate into just schooling conditions for all, particularly for poor, minority youth (Kozol 1991). The following section examines how students' self-representations make them vulnerable to school authorities whose caring for students is oftentimes more centered on what they wear than on who they are.

THE "UNCARING STUDENT" PROTOTYPE

U.S.-born, Seguín ninth-graders are especially preoccupied with looking and acting in ways that make them seem cool. Males tend to be more involved than females in countercultural styles, but many females share these same preoccupations. Boys wear tennis shoes, long T-shirts, and baggy pants with crotches that hang anywhere between mid-thigh to the knees. Also popular are *pecheras* (overalls) with the top flap folded over the stomach, dickies, khaki pants, earrings, and, sometimes, tattoos (many of which are

self-inflicted) on their hands and arms. Boys, and some girls, may also shave their heads partially or fully. Gold-colored chains, crucifixes, and name pendants often dangle from students' necks. The tastes of these urban teens closely resemble those of Latino Angelino youth (see Patthey-Chavez's [1993] ethnography of a Los Angeles high school).

The mainstream values of the high school and its school-sponsored organizations tend to assure that high achievers and students involved in school activities will be underrepresented in the ranks of the "uncaring-student" prototype. Average- and low-achieving ninth-graders concentrated in the school's regular track, on the other hand, are likely to fit the type. This alignment between student type and student attire leads teachers and administrators to use (consciously and unconsciously) greater amounts of garb as a signal. Although the majority of Seguin students do not belong to gangs, school personnel readily associate certain clothing with gang apparel. Most Seguin parents, by contrast, staunchly maintain that the way their children dress has much more to do with their adolescent need to "fit in" than their proclivity for trouble or their membership in any particular gang.

Though the school disapproves of urban hip-hop styles, and views the more exaggerated manifestations as a "problem" that needs to be "fixed," the school itself cultivates this taste in attire through its Channel 1 television programming—which is accessible in virtually every school space where students congregate.³ Students huddled around rap exhibitions on TV in the cafeteria or in a homeroom classroom is a familiar sight. Not all youth, of course, prefer rap and hip-hop but the vast majority of U.S.-born youth appreciate it.

It is not hard to pick out Seguin's "hip" urban youth. They strut about campus in a stiff-legged but rhythmic, slightly forward-bouncing fashion and act like they do not care much about anything. This posturing helps mark group boundaries and communicates solidarity. Exaggerated posturing is evident in certain situations, such as before a fight, or when students get into trouble with school authorities, either as a face-saving strategy or to communicate righteous indignation. I witnessed this in a fight that was quickly broken up by the two district security officers on regular duty at the school. The dispute was over a young woman.

One boy's girlfriend was being courted by a male outside of the group. My field notes reveal how the boys' posturing demarcated group boundaries and signaled to others that a fight was about to occur:

No sooner had I entered the cafeteria than I noticed a student signal to another with an abrupt shake of his head. His friend lunged his head and body backwards as he plowed his hands into his pockets, which hung very low on his hips. His thin frame, erect body, and quick, rigid movements reminded me of those wooden roadrunner toys which simulate drinking when perched at a right-angled tilt. I thought he was reaching for a weapon, but no instrument was drawn or shown. His movements nevertheless grabbed everyone's attention . . . a display of toughness or righteousness for what was about to take place. A third friend then popped onto the scene from out of nowhere. All three approached a smaller guy, who withdrew into a row of students lined up near the nachos food stand about fifteen feet away. A large crowd quickly formed as a couple of punches were thrown, leaving the solitary student on the ground, scrambling to get himself up. Two school cops bustled through the crowd, yelling, "Break it up, boys! Break it up!" The growing crowd started booing and the boys stopped fighting. All four were hauled off in a matter of minutes. A few scrapes and bruises. No one was seriously hurt.

Students who are marginal to the mainstream values of the school overwhelmingly conform to the "uncaring student" prototype. They engage in such deviant behaviors as skipping class and hanging out (lounging in the cafeteria through all three lunch periods is a favorite pastime). Although immigrant youth are typically appalled by the glaring indifference to schooling displayed by U.S.-born youth, whom the immigrant teens view as having become too *americanizados* (or Americanized), a small but noticeable segment within their ranks is seduced into this style of self-representation. Most at risk are youth who have a strong need for acceptance from their acculturated peers. Teachers in the ESL department, in particular, express a great deal of concern for these students who, in the words of one beginning ESL teacher, "wish to assimilate so quickly and so completely that many go too far." This woman is a very caring Anglo, Spanish-speaking

teacher with a clear grasp of her students' political reality and a vivid awareness of the strengths they possess as immigrants entering U.S. schools. She tries to drill in her students' heads the idea that *as immigrants* they are uniquely positioned to succeed.

There's no rush [to assimilate and become American]. *You're* the ones in this school who really and truly possess the capacity to excel. *You're* the ones who have it all. In such a short time, *you* will be bilingual. With your intelligence and your skills, *you*, more than the others, can really make something of your lives.

Except for the handful of wayward immigrant youth, a visit to any of the four assistant principals' offices on any day of the week reveals how homogeneous a group the "uncaring," "trouble-making" students are. Although they tend to be mainly ninth-grade males, girls are increasingly well represented. According to one school police officer, whose opinion is widely shared by the staff, "More and more . . . the girls are no different from the guys." My observations during my many visits to the assistant principals' offices reveal a ratio of one girl processed for every three boys. Despite increasing similarities between males and females with respect to overtly deviant acts, the extreme levels of alienation among many U.S.-born females is still most likely to manifest itself as passivity and quietness in classroom situations. As was manifest in Susana's and even Mr. Johnson's classroom, females deviate less visibly because they respond to the same stimuli within an uncaring environment in a gender-appropriate, and therefore less physically threatening, manner.

The overrepresentation of ninth-graders in this "uncaring student" category is due to three factors. First, many of these students have not yet shed their middle school personae. They are still carrying on with tough, gangster-type attitudes and a clothing style to match. The social pressure to continue in this mode is abetted by the school's high dropout and failure rates, which leave freshmen to make up more than half of the school's total population. Academic failure is so common that in any given year, a full quarter of the students have to repeat the ninth grade for at least a second time. School officials refer to many of these stu-

dents as "career ninth-graders." Second, because many of the ninth-graders were members of middle school "gangs," loosely defined, they are subjected to intense scrutiny by an aggressive, discipline-focused, "zero-tolerance," administration that tends to approach disciplinary problems in a reactive and punitive fashion. "Withdrawing students for inattendance," for example, is a customary way of handling students like these with high absentee rates. In this environment, even the appearance of gang membership often results in students receiving unwelcome attention from school authorities. A self-fulfilling prophecy develops when youth react negatively against school authorities who breathe heavily on them.

Third, upperclassmen tone down their appearance. Tenth- but especially eleventh- and twelfth-grade students make a point of distinguishing themselves from freshmen by dressing differently. Whereas the upperclassmen may still wear baggy jeans or khakis low around their hips, their pants may be pressed and only somewhat baggy. One student I interviewed reminisced about having been a "punk" himself when he was a freshman. Now that he was a football player and working part-time, he decided that he had to "grow up."

Students' informal discussions of their orientations toward schooling and achievement make their teachers' judgments difficult to endorse. As the stories below reveal, Seguin students' definition of education is markedly different from that of school personnel. To varying degrees, the students advance a view that is in line with the meaning of *educación* and conforms to the ideas of caring theorists like Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984). Whereas teachers demand caring about school in the absence of relation, students view caring, or reciprocal relations, as the basis for all learning. Their precondition to caring about school is that they be engaged in a caring relationship with an adult at school.

Laura's encounter with an assistant principal illustrates the trouble youth get into when a school official does not like the way they dress. Laura had come to school that day wearing a long T-shirt emblazoned with the message, "Give Peace a Chance," against a black background streaked with color. She had coupled the shirt with baggy pants that stopped above her ankles, displaying white socks and shiny, black leather combat boots. She

exploded when the assistant principal told her that she had to go home and change her clothes. The following excerpt is from the field notes I wrote that day:

As I sat waiting to speak to the assistant principal, a young woman with white makeup walks in screaming, "What! Are you crazy? What does what I wear have to do with anything? I live alone. I work for my money. And not even my parents tell me what to do or wear. And you're telling me that what I've got on isn't good enough? I don't bother anyone when I go to class. I go to class to learn! School should be about me learning and not about what I wear! This is bullshit!" The assistant principal smiled condescendingly, telling her "Now, now, Laura . . ." and coaxed her into her office where her tirade could not be witnessed by others, including myself. She entered her office, where she continued screaming. She then threw the door open and stomped out of the office all red in the face. Her second outburst, the assistant principal later informs me, landed her with a one-day, on-campus, suspension from school.

I met up with Laura two weeks later at work at a convenience store several blocks from school. She recognized me and immediately divulged that she was still getting "hassled by the school." Although she needed to work in order to support herself, the school counselors were continuing to refuse to enroll her in Cooperative Education, or in the component of the school's Career and Technology Education (CTE) vocational program that enables youth to work for credit off campus for half a day. They based their denials on the fact that Laura had not taken certain prerequisite courses. She was "in violation of the rules."

"So what happens?" Laura asked, rhetorically. "I'm being counted absent every day from three classes to set me up so I'll flunk this semester. They don't even have to say, 'Laura, you're worthless. You should flunk.' All they have to say is, 'We have rules.'"

I recommended that she talk to Ms. Trujillo, Seguin's vocational counselor. I knew that in cases where no other options were available, Ms. Trujillo was willing to use her position as the official CTE counselor on campus to prevent students from dropping out of school by giving them jobs through the Cooperative Education component of CTE. The catch here, for which she and

CTE have drawn fire, is that slipping students in based on their need rather than their academic qualifications weakens the status of the program, which tries to groom and place students into entry-level, corporate-sector jobs. CTE faculty compete against other high schools inside and outside the district for good jobs for their students. Allowing "less-qualified" students to enter the program disrupts the highly selective admissions process, which in turn jeopardizes the corporate relationship, since employers begin questioning the shared understanding of guaranteed student quality.

When I talked to Ms. Trujillo later and asked about Laura, I discovered that the counselor had indeed performed her magic: "Students come first for me and letting a few squeak through the program is a small price to pay if we can keep them from dropping out. We must attend to our students' needs. This young girl has to work to feed, clothe, and support herself."

Laura's conflict with school staff shows the existence of competing definitions of caring. It also makes clear her enormous frustration over being powerless to insert her definition of education into the schooling process. More positively, Laura's story demonstrates the power of a caring counselor who is willing to intervene on a student's behalf, even when that means breaking school rules. The inflexibility of bureaucracies often places caregivers in the problematic position of having to break rules in order to be caring (Fisher and Tronto 1990).

Conflicts between surface and substance are a daily occurrence at Seguin, where great attention is paid to what students wear and it is assumed that style and learning are necessarily connected. In 1994, one of the two parent representatives on the school's Shared Decision-Making Committee suggested that the school require students to wear uniforms as one way to diffuse this conflict. In an ensuing meeting to address the issue, the principal joked, "Their pants are so baggy and lay so far down on the hips that it's no wonder they don't make it to class on time." In this same meeting, a student leader, speaking on behalf of other students, aggressively challenged the recommendation of uniforms, arguing that teenagers' manner of dress is an important aspect of their individuality. In the end, the committee decided to enforce the dress code by outlawing baggy pants for the coming

school year. When classes began in the fall, however, the school was so overrun with baggy pants-wearers that enforcement of the new provision of the dress code was impossible. This outcome also revealed the school's lack of connectedness to the parents and community who could have helped inform and educate students about the new dress code.

Another indication of the fragile nature of teacher caring at the high school is apparent in the case of Carla, a tenth-grader. When she changed her style of dress and choice of friends, she quickly became the object of extraordinary scrutiny from her coaches—despite a seemingly close relationship with them.

Carla lives in a one-bedroom house with her sixty-year-old grandmother and her thirteen-year-old brother in an East End area that is also home to many gang members. Abandoned by her mother, who did not want to raise her or her younger brother, Carla has experienced her fair share of suffering. Family life is stressful. She lives under the constant threat of losing her grandmother to a chronic, upper-respiratory illness and her brother to middle-school gangs. The family is on welfare and they barely manage to survive from one month to the next. As Carla speaks, her lower jaw stiffens and her large, brown eyes squint, exposing teeth-gritting strength, the embittering effects of poverty and abandonment, and an intense sense of responsibility for her loved ones. In her own mind, her future is clear. She tells me, with a mixture of determination and confidence, "I plan to get an athletic scholarship and go to college."

Although Carla's background makes her an unlikely candidate for school success, she is well connected to the school, both through her participation in the athletic program and her placement in honors' classes. Her precarious life in the *barrio*, however, places her at great risk. Her relationship to track team members is a key source of continuity and support. The team is a small, tightly knit group that includes the coaching staff as well as the student-athletes. The track coaches treat the girls like family, providing various kinds of help—including money, rides home, and a sympathetic ear when someone wants to talk over a problem. The coaches fear that Carla's recent friendships with "gangster-looking" types at school and her shift toward ganglike attire may jeopardize her dreams of success.

In response to a question I posed about why she dresses as she does, Carla states flatly that she has to be able to "fit in" in her neighborhood. She explains that, far from trying to make a statement, she is doing her best to *not* stand out in her neighborhood. And she sees her friendships quite differently than do her coaches. Carla says that she is merely spending more time with people whom she has known all of her life.

Carla's choices vividly convey the relationship between "fitting in" and survival, a connection that other research has documented among high-achieving, low-income African American youth (Fordham and Ogbu 1986). The irony of Carla's survival strategy is that it only works in one sphere: in her neighborhood, she blends perfectly into the scenery; at school, she calls unwanted attention to herself, even though her clothing actually strike a middle ground. Although her pants are baggy, they are not falling off her body and they are neatly pressed. She does not smoke nor does she display any tattoos. Unfortunately, these compromises seem to be going unnoticed—or unacknowledged—by her coaches.

There is a clear risk in Carla's efforts to negotiate two conflicting identities. If the adults at school view her as separating herself from the academic identity they would prefer that she sustain, Carla may not get the guidance she needs at the point she most needs it. A breakdown in the process of authentic caring could have extremely damaging effects. Carla's coaches care enough about her to notice apparent changes in her clothes and friends, but they fail to go beyond superficial assessments. Instead of empathizing with Carla's need to be an insider in her own community—as the authentic caring model that Noddings (1984) outlines would have the coaches do—they fall prey to aesthetic caring, emphasizing form over content. They interpret the changes they see in Carla as evidence of her failure to reciprocate their caring. They view her as oppositional, when in fact, she continues to care deeply about her future in the very terms they value.

Carla probably should reconsider the decisions she is making about friends and attire, but the "just-say-no" mentality that informs her teachers' judgments is not only unrealistic, but unappealing. Rather than encouraging dialogue and exploration into the complexity of students' lives, it encourages youth like Carla to

square off in a defensive posture. Since her trust is not easily secured, a rush to judgment is experienced as heavy-handedness.

In the absence of complete information, teachers must rely on students' self-representations—including changes in their public identities—for signals about their deeper emotional and intellectual states. At the same time, it is important to remember that in some contexts meaning may be severed from representation. What may come across as youthful rebelliousness may be nothing more than youth exploring and finding ways to negotiate their lived experience as ethnic, bicultural human beings (Darder 1991). In an ironic twist of fate, this group's whole-hearted embrace of American urban youth culture—their grandly successful “assimilation”—is what assures their teachers' propensity to negatively label them.

“AMERICANIZED” IMMIGRANT YOUTH

In a schooling context that privileges a North American or English-speaking identity over a Mexican or Spanish-speaking one, there is strong pressure to assimilate subtractively. Because peer models favor the hip-hop attire and comportment that currently characterize urban, dispossessed youth, “American-ness” itself assumes a countercultural connotation. Thus, immigrant youth necessarily emulate a marginal peer group culture when fulfilling their desire to “fit in.” The following situations provide some insights that help explain the finding of “accelerated *subtractive* assimilation” among some immigrant youth. These youth share many of the same problems as U.S.-born youth.

Outside Seguin's attendance office in spring 1994, I spoke at length with an immigrant mother whose daughter had not attended classes during any of the previous six-week grading period. Had a family emergency not brought the mother to campus that day, she might never have discovered that her daughter had been “withdrawn for inattendance.” Until that day, she thought that her daughter had been attending school daily. The mother had approached an attendance officer to find out which class her daughter was in that period, only to discover that her daughter's name was not listed on any class roster. Because this

woman was visibly distressed and the attendance officers were obviously busy with other students and parents, I approached her and offered my assistance.

With her arms wrapped around her waist, Mrs. Treviño doubled over and wept softly as I tried to guide her to the nearby steps in the center of the hall where she could sit down. “*Ha fallecido mi papá y tenemos que irnos a México y vengo a la escuela a descubrir esto?*” she cried. (“My father has died and we have to go to Mexico and I come to school to discover this?”) I told her that I was sorry and I suggested that perhaps her daughter could make up the work in summer school. With an incredulous tone in her voice, Mrs. Treviño vented her anger with the school for failing to notify her of her daughter's lack of attendance:

Uno deja a sus hijos esperando que las escuelas los esten cuidando y no nos informan que nuestros hijos no han estado asistiendo. O esperan que nos digan nuestros hijos. Cómo nos van a decir ellos si ellos mismos son los que estan quebrando las reglas? Y que si le hubiera pasado algo a mi jita . . . ? Entonces que? (One leaves one's children trusting that the schools are taking care of them and they inform us that our children are not attending. Or they expect our children to tell us. How are they going to tell us if they're the ones breaking the rules? And what if something had happened to my daughter . . . ? Then what?)

Mrs. Treviño's daughter rounded the corner carrying textbooks in her arms. She was in the process of withdrawing from school and was returning her books to the registrar's office. I realized that I recognized her from a lunch time discussion during the previous fall semester. I was struck by the incongruity of this young woman being Mrs. Treviño's daughter. She wore extraordinarily baggy khaki pants—which somehow at the same time clung to her narrow hips—and her head was partially shaved in broad strokes around her ears, exposing olive-brown skin. She sported a tiny, golden nose earring. “Yes, I know you. You're Elvia, right? Do you remember me?” I asked. She acknowledged me with a slight nod. I also realized for the first time that she spoke Spanish. In a soft voice with her head lowered, the daughter said, “*Amá, tengo que entregar estos libros. Ahorita vuelvo por usted.*” (“Mom, I have to turn in these books. I'll come back

for you in a minute.”) I also noted that she spoke formally to her mother, using the formal pronoun “*usted*,” instead of the more familiar form, “*tú*.” Her mother’s voice trembled as she told her daughter that now she would have to contend with her father. Looking humiliated, Elvia glanced at me and walked away.

Me da verguenza como se mira y como se viste. Verdaderamente, me da verguenza! Y cómo la puedo llevar a México vestida así? Y con ese aretito? Imagínate? Ni parece Mexicana! Mrs. Treviño lamented. (“The way she looks and dresses embarrasses me. It really embarrasses me! And how can I take her to Mexico like that? And with that little earring? Can you imagine? She doesn’t even look Mexican!”)

She then assured me that her daughter did not learn to be this way in their home. The mother added that she had two older sons and an older daughter, none of whom ever caused her any serious problems. “*Pero ésta, la mas chiquita, es fuerte de carácter!*” (“But this one, the youngest one, has a stubborn character!”)

The family situation had been very unstable. Mr. Treviño was a migrant laborer who spent part of the year in Michigan harvesting beets and other vegetables. For the previous two years, he had also spent months at a time in Mexico helping take care of his father who was dying slowly from cancer. The family’s story gushed out of Mrs. Treviño’s mouth as she repeatedly wiped tears from her face. I embraced her and told her not to feel obligated to tell me anything.

“*Al contrario, no quiero ser una molestia para usted,*” she said. (“To the contrary, it is I who does not wish to trouble you.”)

“*No es ninguna molestia,*” I assured her. (“It’s no trouble whatsoever.”)

So she continued, explaining that she worked evenings as a waitress while her older daughter, who held a daytime job, stayed at home with Elvia during the evenings. Elvia continually challenged her sister’s authority and also had her friends over on a regular basis. They spent most of their time talking, although the mother also suspected that Elvia was taking drugs. She noted dryly that Elvia always underestimates her ability to detect the smell of marijuana or to recognize when she and her friends are high.

Mrs. Treviño thought that perhaps she had made a mistake by allowing Elvia to have her current set of friends. But she also admitted that her daughter had shown troubling tendencies since middle school. “*Es cuando empezó a vestirse como un Chicano. Siempre ha sido importante para ella ser aceptada por sus amigas y la influyen mucho,*” she mused. (“It’s when she began to dress like a Chicano. It has always been important for her to be accepted by her friends.”) By the time Elvia entered high school, Mrs. Treviño had decided not to make an issue of her daughter’s attire. The haircut and the earring were recent additions. They had appeared this year when Elvia began hanging out with friends who spoke to one another either in English or in “Spanglish,” a dialect that uses both languages. She laments that although she speaks to Elvia in Spanish, Elvia responds primarily in English: “*Y si puede hablar el Español pero parece que no le gusta.*” (“And she can speak Spanish but it seems as if she does not like to.”) She found it strange that the daughter she had attempted to spare from the kind of hardships the family had endured earlier is the same one that she has now “lost.” I asked her to elaborate. How had she “lost” Elvia?

The mother prefaced her explanation by saying that she was convinced that the success she had with her other children (all of whom had graduated from Seguin) was related to their prior schooling in Mexico. She left her children with their grandparents until they completed *primaria* (grade school). She remarked that leaving the children in Mexico while she and her husband lived and worked in Houston had been very hard—but it was impossible with her youngest. Then Mrs. Treviño sighed. Smiling faintly, she confessed with rueful affection, “*Me la traje conmigo. Yo no pude dejar a mi bebida, mi Elvita.*” (“I brought her with me. I could not leave my little baby, my Elvita.”)

A few moments later, Elvia returned. I asked her if everything was okay. “Yeah, I just checked out of school,” she replied, her eyes glistening, as if she might burst into tears at any moment.

“Don’t worry, Mom,” she said, “I’ll make it up. I’ll take summer school. I promise.” With a look of disappointment on her face, her mother shook her head and rolled her eyes in disbelief. When her mother stepped away to use the restroom, I was able to talk to Elvia alone.

AV. It's pretty bad, huh?

ET. Yeah, I can't stand it. . . . I wish she was mad at me instead.

AV. So what's the problem? Why haven't you been going to classes?

ET. I just don't like school and I used to like it. I just can't get into my classes this year. They're all so boring and no one seems to care if I show up. And then they talk down to you when you do show up.

AV. What do you mean?

ET. It's like all of our teachers have given up and they don't want to teach us no more. In one class, I had a sub [substitute teacher] for all the time I was there, for four weeks! And he can't teach us nothing because he don't know math. The dude tried but that wasn't good enough, man! God, it just kills me to give that man even just a little bit of my time! If the *school* doesn't care about my learning, why should I care? Answer me that. Just answer me that! A friend of mine dropped out of high school, took her GED, and went on to college. I tell my Mom that's what I want to do, but it's like she don't get it.

AV. So what was your brothers' and sister's experience here at Seguin?

ET. They just took all the crap you get here. It's like, "You're Mexican; take crap." Well, man, I got some pride and self-respect. "Sorry to disappoint you, but *this* Mexican don't take crap." Mexicans who do, embarrass the hell out of me. I just want to tell them, "Lay off the humble trip, man. You some damn *Indio* (Indian) or something?"

Elvia's anger with and alienation from schooling is unmistakable. Her questionable choice in friends combined with insufficient parental monitoring to influence her disaffection from schooling. She was in need of much more concerted attention than an older sister could provide. Whereas certain "shortcuts" or compromises taken within families may be expedient and perhaps unavoidable at the time—especially for poor families struggling to make ends meet—the end result can be disastrous.

Further complicating matters at school was a lack of authentic caring as well as a lack of aesthetic caring in one of her classes that stretched Elvia beyond her limits. Her story made me wonder whether, if she and I traded places, I would be able to toler-

ate such a bad situation for very long. Elvia's case also brings to the foreground a schooling strategy that is increasingly common among youth in HISD schools: they drop out of high school, secure a General Equivalency Diploma, and enroll in community college.⁴

Elvia's dramatic departure from her siblings' educational experiences is partly evident in her unflattering portrayal of Mexican immigrants. She sees them as spineless individuals, lacking in "pride and self-respect." She further attributes this weakness to cultural factors—that is, to their "Indian-ness." Although expressed off-handedly, Elvia's dismissal of immigrants reveals the complexities of a colonized *mestiza* (Spanish and Indian mixed-blood) undergoing a personal decolonization process. Even as Elvia asserts her Mexican identity in a U.S. context, she negates her indigenous ancestry. "De-Indianization" is a manifestation of the subtractive assimilation processes that operate at a transnational level wherever indigenous communities are viewed with contempt.⁵ I never saw Elvia again, but I noted with relief and pleasure that her name was included on the school roster in the attendance office the following year.

Rapid cultural assimilation, marked by a strong orientation either to the peer group or to the culture of the peer group, characterized every immigrant youth I observed who conformed to the "uncaring student" prototype. The contrast in language, clothing, demeanor, and other cultural markers between these young people and their parents is stark. Whatever its source, a need for acceptance by the more Americanized peer group appears to contribute to youths' accelerated effort to assimilate.

In the handful of cases of rapidly culturally assimilated students I observed, the most vulnerable youth within the immigrant generation were those who had been born in Mexico or Latin America but who had lived most of their lives and had been schooled in the United States. These teens, of whom Elvia is a striking example, more closely resemble their U.S.-born peers than their immigrant counterparts and are referred to in the literature as "1.5 generation" youth (Vigil 1997). Still, even the recently arrived are sometimes drawn into accelerated cultural assimilation, as a story told to me by an immigrant mother who was also a custodial worker at the high school, illustrates.

Mrs. Galvez, a single mother with three sons, had been living in the United States for approximately six years. She told me that her oldest son, Ignacio, was her biggest worry. In fact, he was the reason that she had taken a daytime job at Seguin as a custodial worker over a higher-paying evening job at a shipping company. She worked the same hours that her sons attended high school so that she could also be at home with them at night. Notwithstanding his mother's efforts, Ignacio dropped out of school at the beginning of his tenth-grade year "*porque no le gustó*" ("because he didn't like it"). Mrs. Galvez believed that her son's decision was partly a consequence of her divorce from her husband, which had been finalized nine months earlier, during the fall semester when Ignacio dropped out. When his father returned to Mexico shortly after the divorce, Ignacio became withdrawn and depressed.

Mrs. Galvez was currently trying to get her son to return home; he was living with a young white woman whom he had met at a rock concert. He had moved in with this woman after he and Mrs. Galvez had argued over a one hundred dollar bill that had gone missing from his mother's purse. After Mrs. Galvez had tricked Ignacio into admitting that he had taken the money, she told him that if he wasn't going to attend school, he would have to get a full-time job to help support the family. The argument escalated and then ended abruptly when Ignacio bolted from the house. About one-and-a-half months had passed since the argument. Mrs. Galvez still had not seen her son, but she had spoken to him the day before. "*Creo que ahora quiere regresarse a la casa,*" she told me ("I believe he wants to return home now").

She felt that Ignacio was punishing her for the divorce. From her perspective, the divorce had been a matter of self-respect. Her husband had been unfaithful and had taken several *queridas* (lovers) over the course of their marriage. "*También le gustaba la tomada,*" she added ("He also liked to drink.") Her ex-husband's philandering had made home life stressful. His most recent affair proved to be more than Mrs. Galvez was willing to bear. She ordered him out. Sadly, in ridding herself of an abusive husband, she also rid her children of their father. They lost contact with him after he returned to Mexico. Plaintively, Mrs. Galvez summed up the situation: "*Ni una sola llamada. Ésto es lo que*

mas ha afectado a mis hijos, especialmente al mayor." ("Not even a single call. This is what has most affected my sons, especially the oldest.") Ignacio may have been angry with his father for not keeping in touch with the family, "*Pero también lo extraña mucho,*" Mrs. Galvez observed. ("But he also misses [his father] a lot.")

She was not completely sure why of all her children it was her oldest son who seemed the most affected by the father's absence, but she thought that it probably had something to do with the fact that they were very close when Ignacio was just a child, before the extramarital affairs began. Not having any relatives living nearby may have been another contributing factor.

I asked her to elaborate on her son's changes. She said that he had undergone a fairly rapid transformation. "*No lo podía creer!*" ("I couldn't believe it!") she exclaimed. Several months prior to the divorce, but when his parents were already separated, Ignacio stopped wearing belts and began wearing baggy pants and black T-shirts adorned with what looked to Mrs. Galvez like diabolical designs and messages. He began listening to heavy metal music for hours, stretched out on his bed, with his tape recorder headset on. He would come out of his bedroom long enough for a quiet dinner and then retreat to his room once again.

After he dropped out of Seguin, Ignacio cultivated the habit of sleeping through the day and staying up through the night. This schedule left his mother uncertain about exactly what he was up to. Though he had taken money from her, she suspected that he was getting money from somewhere besides her purse, because he could afford to attend concerts. He told her that he earned money doing odd jobs as a day laborer; she could never confirm this because she was always at work. Several tattoos appeared on his upper arms and he had his head partially shaved. Ignacio had transformed his bedroom wall into a giant mural, filled with pictures that he tore out of rock music and car magazines. What most worried his mother was that, except for the girlfriend, Ignacio did not seem to have any friends, "*Y rehusa hablar conmigo*" ("And he refuses to talk to me").

I suggested the possibility of either individual or family counseling. Mrs. Galvez said that she had already gotten a referral for her son to see a professional counselor from Communities in

Schools (CIS), but Ignacio had failed to show up for his scheduled appointment. That Ignacio had requested the appointment himself suggested that he knew he was in need of help. Mrs. Galvez commented on how hard it is to raise children in this society. In Spanish, she said, "There's so much confusion. In trying to be someone else, Ignacio forgot who he was." She wished that the school could help her son, and others like him, with the kind of counseling they need to make wiser decisions. As a high school custodial worker, she sees how many youth are tempted to go off in the wrong direction. Her conversation with her son earlier that day had left her hopeful.

"*Espero que regrese pronto a la casa. Creo que ya se le ha acabado el dinero,*" she confided. ("I expect him to return home soon. I think he ran out of money.")

"*Sería bueno,*" I agree. ("That would be good.")

Growing nervous about the time we had spent talking, Mrs. Galvez shook my hand, and then quickly made her way to the nearby teachers' lounge, clutching her dust-mop.

Both Elvia and Ignacio express a need to belong or to "fit in" to the peer group of the dominant culture. The more worrisome of the two teenagers is the solitary and despondent Ignacio who recognizes that he has a serious problem and needs help, but can't quite make it happen. Since schooling factors distinguished Elvia from her siblings, I made a point of inquiring further about Ignacio's schooling experiences the next time I ran into Mrs. Galvez.

Mrs. Galvez said that Ignacio had been a diligent student in Mexico but that the *primaria* (elementary school) he had attended through the fifth grade had not been particularly good. Ignacio had attended a rural school near the family's home in the countryside outside of San Luis Potosí, Mexico. Low teacher salaries and poor working conditions, especially very large class sizes, resulted in a high attrition rate among the school's students and staff. The lack of staff had resulted in the school being closed for half a year when Ignacio was to have entered the first grade. Though she had not given it much thought because Ignacio never talked about school, Mrs. Galvez said that Ignacio's prior learning experiences in Mexico may have contributed to his apparent unhappiness with school in the United States.

Ignacio serves as an important reminder that not all immi-

grant youth are able to translate their schooling experiences in Mexico into a positive schooling experience in the United States, as the following chapter finds, is generally the case. Schools in the homeland must also have been accessible and able to provide youth with continuous learning experiences. In the absence of such a foundation, immigrant youth are at great risk of dropping out of school. If, in addition, they strive for rapid cultural assimilation, the result may be acute maladjustment. In their rush to claim a new identity, these young people become marginal not only with respect to the academic mainstream, but also in relation to their family's social identity. This dynamic is clear in both students' cases; their mothers agonize over the "loss" of their children. In each case, what had been lost was the child's Mexican cultural identity.

Though revealing the importance of prior schooling experiences, the preceding discussion also highlights the interplay between subtractive cultural assimilation and student disaffection. With her wish for a school-based "cultural therapy," Ignacio's mother conveys her recognition of the destabilizing consequences of rapid cultural change, as well as her belief in schools' potential for playing a productive role in helping youth negotiate their emergent cultural identities. Her son's psychological well-being could have been better protected had the school mediated a discussion of the potential pitfalls that exist in the dominant culture, as well as the dangers attendant upon the attempt to assimilate very quickly.

From a critical perspective on biculturalism (Darder 1991, 1995), students' "choices" in identity, however constrained, are optimally premised on an affirmation of the new identity that effectively expands one's cultural and linguistic repertoire. "Choices" based on a disaffirmation of self—that is, one's original identity—is hardly a choice at all since this set of options pits one culture against the other. Expressed differently, the two cases reveal the alienating consequences of schools' failure to be additive, by confirming the language, history, and experiences of the cultural "other." If some immigrant youth are susceptible to the messages that demean their worth, how much more vulnerable are U.S.-born youth—whose Mexican identities are often less firm—to such messages? The following section examines some of the ways in which students resist these messages.

“NOT CARING” AS STUDENT RESISTANCE

What looks to teachers and administrators like opposition and lack of caring, feels to students like powerlessness and alienation. Some students' clear perception of the weakness of their position politicizes them into deliberately conveying an uncaring attitude as a form of resistance not to education, but to the irrelevant, uncaring, and controlling aspects of schooling (Callahan 1962; LeCompte and Dworkin 1991). Take Frank, for example.

Frank is an unusually reflective ninth-grader. As a C-student, he achieves far below his potential. One of Frank's teachers, Mr. Murray, tells him that if he would only apply himself more, he could prepare himself well for college. Instead, Frank exerts himself only when a classroom assignment happens to interest him. Mr. Murray, who correctly noted and followed up on Frank's interest in science, has become the boy's mentor and sounding board. Whereas Mr. Murray sees Frank as he truly is—as a “thinker”—his other teachers generally perceive him as passive and indifferent. In a very thoughtful, intense discussion with me, Frank explained his approach to schooling:

FRANK. I don't get with the program because then it's doing what *they* [teachers] want for my life. I see *Mexicanos* who follow the program so they can go to college, get rich, move out of the *barrio*, and never return to give back to their *gente* [people]. Is that what this is all about? If I get with the program, I'm saying that's what it's all about and that teachers are right when they're not. Except for Mr. Murray, I don't care what teachers think because then they can control me.

AV. Does Mr. Murray control you?

FRANK (*smiling*). He does make me think about college but I still ask myself for what. I could go to college if I wished, but for what?

For Frank, not caring constitutes resistance to teachers, school, and a curriculum that he views as meaningless because it is not helping him to become a “better” person, that is, a socially minded individual who cares about his community. Moreover, teachers' definition of caring—which involves a commitment to a predetermined set of ideas—is equivalent to cultural genocide. Success in school means consenting to the school's project of cultural disparagement and de-identification. Frank is not unwilling

to become a productive member of society; he is simply at odds with a definition of productivity that is divorced from the social and economic interests of the broader Mexican community. With his indifference, Frank deliberately challenges schooling's implicit demand that he derogate his culture and community.

Frank's critique of schooling approximates that of Tisa, another astute U.S.-born, female student that I came across in the course of my group interviews (“Friends from the ‘Hood” group). When I asked Tisa whether a college education was necessary in order to have a nice house and car, and to live in a nice neighborhood, she provided the following response:

You can make good money dealing drugs, but all the dealers—even if they drive great cars—they still spend their lives in the ‘hood. Not to knock the ‘hood at all. . . . If only us *raza* [the Mexican American people] could find a way to have all three, money . . . *clean* money, education, and the ‘hood.

In a very diplomatic way, she took issue with the way I framed the question. Rather than setting up two mutually compatible options of being successful and remaining in one's home community, Tisa interpreted my question in either/or terms that in her mind unfairly juxtaposed success to living in the ‘hood. That I myself failed to anticipate its potentially subtractive logic—at least according to one legitimate interpretation—caused me to reflect on the power of the dominant narrative of mobility in U.S.-society—an “out-of-the-*barrio*” motif, as it were (Chavez 1991; but also see Suro 1998).⁶ These findings bring to mind the ethos that Ladson-Billings (1994) identifies as central to culturally relevant pedagogy for African American youth. Specifically, effective teachers of African American children see their role as one of “giving back to the community.”

Returning to Frank, his relationship with Mr. Murray inspires hope. His teacher reminds him that he does really care about education. Because his other teachers do not distinguish between schooling and education, they are unlikely to notice and nurture Frank's interests the way Mr. Murray has.

I asked Frank if he ever expresses his very thoughtful and important opinions in class. He says no, explaining that he's sure that he'd never get any “backup” from other students.

"Mexicans are too damned polite, taking whatever it is the teacher tells them. It's like you say something and it's like you never said anything when no one says, 'Yeah, Frank, what you said was right.'"

"Why don't Mexicans speak up?" I question.

"Because they're afraid of what the teacher will say, or they think other students will laugh at them, or maybe it's like no one ever does, so what's the use?" Aggravated, Frank asserts, "It doesn't matter to speak up anyway. For what? What's the point? So I never open my mouth."

As critical as Frank is about the subtractive nature of the curriculum, his relationship with Mr. Murray illustrates that at least in the short term, there is a possibility of salvaging disaffected youth through a caring relationship. Mr. Murray demonstrates genuine interest in Frank as a person. Most of the time the two spend talking, they focus on topics of interest to Frank; sometimes these include science, sometimes not. The mainstream curriculum is thus demonstrably accessible through a route responsive to students' definition of caring, that is, *caring as relation*.

A senior male, Rodrigo's approach is an even clearer example of how some students use "not caring" as a strategy of resistance. Though capable of excelling in honors' classes, he chooses to remain in the regular curriculum to which he had automatically been assigned after transferring to Seguin from a magnet school in another area of the city. Besides being an avid reader, Rodrigo has been writing poetry and prose for much of his young life. Wellsprings of inner strength emanate, in great part, from his role in his family's protracted struggle with his mother's long-standing comatose condition. "The last time I saw my mother was in kindergarten," he reminisces, referring to the last time he saw her as a whole, healthy person. After seeing Rodrigo off to school one day, she went to the hospital for a routine hysterectomy. During the operation, human error resulted in oxygen loss to her brain, causing extensive brain damage. Despite a decent monetary settlement and the passage of more than a decade, neither Rodrigo's father nor his two older half-sisters and half-brother have fully recovered from this catastrophe.

Rodrigo's breadth of knowledge of Chicana and Chicano literature easily rivals that of any college graduate specializing in

this field. Not only does he have detailed knowledge of poetry and fiction, poets and authors, he also knows which publishers are the most progressive on questions of multiculturalism. He has an expansive portfolio of written works, parts of which he takes to high schools and community gatherings where he has been invited to read. Gifts of books from publishers, professors, and other donors stand on shelves alongside those he purchases, filling a large space that he refers to as his "library" in his backyard garage.

Rodrigo laces his conversation with lines of poetry from various works, including his own. A memorable verse from one of his poems, titled "Woman," brought tears to my eyes as it flowed sweetly from his mouth: "I have touched Mexican women, but not as much as they have touched me." Personal tragedy, coupled with his literary expeditions, have made of Rodrigo the feminist he is today.

When he and I first met, Rodrigo was involved in preparations to teach a multicultural literature class after school to at least ten fellow students who had expressed interest. Although he secured the principal's permission to teach the class, in the end, Rodrigo's plans came to nothing. The principal was unable to come up with the funds needed to cover the cost of the text Rodrigo wanted to use. The process of preparing the class was an education in itself. According to Rodrigo, when he came into contact with teachers at the high school who had not met him before, they wondered where this remarkable young man had come from. Some wondered, as well, whether he might be half white because of the lightness of his complexion. Rodrigo was insulted by the implication that a dark-skinned Mexican could not be either as gifted or as accomplished as he. One of the aims of his course was to combat just that kind of stereotyping, as well as other negative images teachers held toward his fellow students in the regular curriculum track:

They have this image of kids, that we are just messed up in the head. That's not really true because many students here—I think their intellectual ability is just too high for them to be in regular classes, but they don't enter honors classes. There are people out there who just think that we are into sex and drugs. That's not true. I can't say that I'm just one exception because

there are many exceptions. At this school, there are many students, but some teachers at this school . . . I'll start saying this because it's true. Certain teachers say, "No, let's not read this. This is too hard for these kids. No, let's not read John Keats. No, Shakespeare's Hamlet. Let's show the movie or let's not learn about Excalibur. Let's not read it, but let's watch the film." That's something that I see, always some other kind of source that they turn to that is some kind of a secondary source, something that is not on level, but a little bit more basic.

Rodrigo's decision to remain in the regular track at Seguin was influenced by his disappointment with the magnet program at the high school in which he had been enrolled before transferring to Seguin. "There they paid more attention to the grades rather than to your thinking ability," he said. One result of this narrow focus, Rodrigo observed, was that although "kids have good arguments . . . they have absolutely no argument skills. The only argument they have is probably to curse. Say the F-word and that's it." He added that if it were not for his commitment to self-education, he would never have realized how wrong-headedly schools approach their mandate to educate. He further speculated that it was his independent-mindedness that made school tolerable and kept him from dropping out. He blamed widespread academic failure on the administration and teachers, not on the students. Schooling was thus an obstacle to Rodrigo's education and his devaluation of scholastic achievement represented his silent rebellion against uninspiring curricula, misplaced priorities, and teachers' lowered expectations. Health was the class he valued the most at Seguin. In a pragmatic tone, he remarked, "Health is important to keep your body maintained."

Rejected from Rice University and the University of Houston because his high school grades and SAT scores were low, Rodrigo enrolled as an undergraduate student at Kenyon College, a prestigious liberal arts college in the Midwest. He found out about the college from an information brochure he plucked out of the wastebasket in a Seguin counselor's office. The school looked beyond the "objective" data of grades and raw scores and admitted Rodrigo on the basis of his vast and creative intellect. The earlier rejections still rankle, however:

U of H told me that I needed to apply through special admissions. I told them, "No! Look at my portfolio. This is who I am and what I can do. If I didn't do well in school, it's because I didn't care about school. It wasn't challenging. Accept me for who I am, not for some number or letter on a piece of paper."

Rodrigo's words and experiences summarize students' experiences, generally, of profound alienation from, and hostility toward, uncaring bureaucracies. Universities' and colleges' insistence on evidence of student conformity to the high school curriculum, regardless of whether that curriculum is challenging and supportive or degrading and meaningless, closes off an important avenue of advancement for many potentially productive youth. There is little reason to bother aspiring to higher education if the price of admission must be prepaid in yearly installments of humiliation and alienation. Making schools and schooling affirmative, truly educational experiences for all students requires implementing changes that reach deep into the structure of the educational system. Using daily life at Seguin as a guide, the first and arguably the most important step is to introduce a culture of authentic caring that incorporates all members of the school community as valued and respected partners in education. The next section explores some of the positive effects that emerge when teachers and teachers, as well as teachers and students truly connect with one another.

CARING AND PEDAGOGY

The art of initiating a relationship is well expressed through the words of one of Seguin's most beloved social studies teachers, Ms. Aranda. In my interview with her, she conveys her philosophy of teaching as caring:

Kids have to know the line so that they know not to cross it and so they know that they've crossed it. Whenever students are acting up, I take them out of the classroom and ask them, "What have I done that would cause you to act that way?" This question always disarms them because usually they can't imagine that me, a teacher, would suggest that I had done something wrong. And then after they say either yes, that I was the prob-

lem because they thought I was picking on them in class or no. I ask them what it is that's causing them to act in the way that they do? I always try to work things out with them individually. Sometimes, kids have certain problems that make me work out a personal arrangement with them. Like if they work a lot at night, I may tell them that they don't need to take a test but that they could be evaluated by pursuing another kind of project. What's important is that they need to know that I am fair, that I will listen to them, that they can come to me and talk and deal with a problem.

The need for a culturally sensitive curriculum is not lost on Ms. Aranda who works at structuring her classes so that all students feel included:

ESL kids are the most shy and they benefit a lot from group activities. I provide opportunities for them by giving them the chance to bring something of interest from their country for show and tell. This gets them talking. I also provide opportunities for them by allowing them to work on assignments bilingual—like a bilingual newspaper. Or I allow them to write a story about an event that goes on along the border. So the paper might deal with Piedras Negras or something like that.

Since Ms. Aranda is also the chair of the Social Studies Department, her leadership is key. Their collectivist, team-building approach makes it one of the stronger academic departments on campus. Consider further Ms. Aranda's winning strategy:

Collaborative planning with teachers is essential. Teachers need to share with other teachers, exchange information and ideas, and they need to feel supported for their efforts. Teachers who have less time don't necessarily have to be creative. They just have to be able to copy. So we meet a lot, which is something that other teachers don't do. And so while it might seem like an extra demand that's placed on them, it gets passed off as support because we all happen to get along.

The productive power of healthy professional relationships rings clear in Ms. Aranda's account. She exemplifies the desirable qualities Assistant Principal Ana Luera is attempting to develop in other teachers. Interestingly, one advantageous factor mentioned by faculty inside and outside the Social Studies Depart-

ment is that they are at greater liberty to provide an enriching curriculum because they are far less responsible for raising students' test scores than their counterparts in mathematics and English. Since no comparable social studies' test exists, these teachers are not reduced to the curricular imperative that they "teach to the test."

Though I did not have the opportunity to examine in greater depth the extent to which all other social studies departmental members embody Ms. Aranda's near-perfect mix between aesthetic and authentic caring, one thing is certain. Through her leadership, she helps create space and opportunity for her faculty to advance beyond the aesthetic, or technical, toward a more authentic pedagogy. Ms. Aranda is thus helping build a framework for institutionalized caring. At least one other faculty member I came to know in her department responds on cue.

Ms. Novak, a youngish African-American teacher, is an exceptionally caring and giving individual who openly expresses her love for her students: "I just love the ninth-graders. I think they're so funny! I don't know why other teachers don't like them. I only like the ninth grade! They make me laugh all the time." The following representative comments expressed by students I came across of both Ms. Aranda and Ms. Novak reveal the power of their double-barreled caring:

Ms. Novak is the best teacher I ever had. The way she laughs at us makes us happy, you know, like she *really* likes us. I learn easier that way. (Third-generation, ninth-grade female student)

What makes Ms. Novak a great teacher is that she's organized and laid-back at the same time. Everything looked too pretty, too stiff when I first walked in her room. But now I see that she's just doing everything she can to make sure that we learn and that we're happy about learning, too. Even when I'm sick, I still come to school to be in her class because she makes you feel nice, you know, like you're wanted or something. (Second-generation, ninth-grade male student)

Ms. Aranda is the best teacher I ever had. I never got bored in her class. And I learned so much. I came to respect her even more after she helped out this friend. She wanted to drop out of school and missed a lot of homework and tests. Other teachers

flunked her but Ms. Aranda helped her catch up. If something like that came up with me, I know I could go to her with it. (Second-generation, ninth-grade female student)

Like I like the way Ms. Aranda is nice to the ESL students. It's like they just got here and they need special help. They got to do some stuff [assignments] in Spanish and we all learned. It's nice to see your language be part of your learning. It's like, wow! That's me, my culture, my language. . . . She's *gente* [good people]! (Third-generation, ninth-grade male student)

Some of the most compelling evidence that students do care about education despite their rejection of schooling is found among the great number of students who skip most classes chronically, but who regularly attend one class that is meaningful to them. Terry is a good example of this group. Although his overall attendance is erratic, he never misses his mechanics class. Auto mechanics, taught by Mr. Lundgren, is the only class where he feels he really learns something. Mr. Lundgren confirms that he sees many boys like Terry. He tells me that these boys find most of their classes irrelevant and thus consider them unimportant: "Mechanics is more closely connected to their sense of the future than their academic classes." Mr. Lundgren is certain that were it not for the CTE vocational courses, many more students would find school meaningless and drop out. His sentiments are shared unanimously by Seguin's other CTE teachers.

My extensive observations of the CTE program lead me to conclude that the acquisition of work skills is compatible with the acquisition of both academic knowledge and an aspiration for postsecondary education. Most CTE teachers make a point of positively reinforcing the academic curriculum. They feel misunderstood by their colleagues in mainstream academic fields, who tend to dismiss the CTE program on the mistaken grounds that it is insufficiently intellectually rigorous. Several CTE teachers told me that they suspected that part of the reason for the disdainful treatment they often receive from other teachers and administrators was simple envy: CTE staff earn higher salaries, teach smaller classes, and have final say over which students may enroll in the higher-level courses they teach.

Mr. Lundgren provides a good model of a positive interface

between the academic curriculum and the CTE program. He pays close attention to his students' writing. When he assigns a descriptive paper on internal combustion, for example, he knows that the majority will find the subject interesting and thus he expects—and requires—that his students produce well-written papers. In addition, after he grades the papers, he gives every student a chance to rewrite the assignment if they want to try for a higher grade. Because Mr. Lundgren provides a detailed evaluation on each paper he hands back, most students take advantage of the opportunity to rewrite. Few settle for a poor grade on a written assignment.

In some cases, Mr. Lundgren gives his Spanish-dominant students the opportunity to do the assignment in Spanish. He mentioned a female student whose poor English-language skills would have made the paper assignment overwhelming. "She struggles a little bit but she does read a little bit in English." For the most part, language is not a barrier for Mr. Lundgren, partly because he understands some Spanish, but also because he makes use of other students in his class. "The ones who don't understand [English], I know who they are and they're sitting next to a friend of theirs who translates to them and tells them what I expect," he says. While I found his capacity and willingness to reach out to students extraordinary, Mr. Lundgren could not have been more unassuming about his approach: "My goal is to get them to write and what language they write in makes no difference to me."

Mr. Lundgren regularly counsels students, advising all—and convincing a few—that to be good mechanics, they need math and that to be able to run their own auto shops, they need to be able to read and write well. Mr. Lundgren indicated to me that what Terry (and others like him) needs is someone to care enough to take the time to help him see the connections between what he learns in school and what he wants to do with his life.

The virtues of a standardized curriculum that middle-class youth take for granted are difficult for the Terrys of the world to appreciate. Terry's behavior is his critique of schooling, namely, that it is meaningless, unrewarding, and irrelevant to his life. Terry did change his behavior the following semester largely because of Mr. Lundgren's advice, encouragement, and gentle prodding. Whereas Terry skipped continuously before, he now

religiously attends all of his classes. He now desires to work toward the goal of owning his own auto mechanics shop someday. Like the scores of youth who skip every single class except the one where a caring teacher may be found, Terry's renewed interest in school is directly attributable to Mr. Lundgren's connectedness to him.

Though I never pursued the issue, Mr. Lundgren made me contemplate the effects of an inclusive pedagogy that respects all youth regardless of their linguistic abilities. While the immigrant youth he mentioned directly benefited, it is easy to imagine that his capacity to work with youths' differences have contributed to the authority he commands in the classroom. Since relationships with teachers like Mr. Lundgren are often either short-lived or nonexistent, however, Seguin would do well to heed Noddings' (1992) call for continuity (in place, people, and curriculum). Such continuity permits the development of trusting relationships and preempts students from turning exclusively to peers and strategies for academic survival that often increase their marginalization.

WHEN TEACHERS DO NOT INITIATE RELATION

Students' desire for reciprocal relationships with adults at school is tempered by their experience, which teaches them not to expect such relationships. As Noddings (1984) has noted, students' weak power position relative to school personnel makes it incumbent that the adults be the initiators of social relationships. Mark, an academically average ninth-grade student, explains why he is content to achieve far below his potential:

MARK. It's cool to look like you don't care 'bout nuthin' 'cause then you're bad. Maybe some students act that way to get at the teachers, I don't know. I do it just to be cool, I guess, though I don't really think about it.

AV. But underneath, you really care about school, huh?

MARK (*pausing*). Yeah, I guess so.

AV. You had to think about that.

MARK. I know like school is good for me, but there's lots of things I don't like about it.

AV. Like what?

MARK. I don't know, I can't explain.

AV. Like your classes?

MARK. The teachers . . . they're not bad. It's just that they're not good.

Further discussion elicited the basis for Mark's assessment. He had attended a Catholic private school during the eighth grade because his parents were concerned about his declining grades and the rowdy set of boys he had befriended. He told me that he had accepted his parents' decision because he was not learning much in his middle school anyway.

With each addition to his story, Mark's thin layers of aloofness and defensiveness dissolved, exposing an impish personality. I began to anticipate a "punch line." He said that he had really enjoyed his one-year stay at the school, and he would have continued, except that his parents could not afford the tuition after his father had lost his job as the manager of a small business. Mark recalled how the interest that one of the nuns, Sister Mary Agnes, took in him helped him to discover that he had an instinctive talent for world geography.

"I can name you the capital of almost any country in the world," he boasted.

"What's the capital of Ireland?" I quizzed.

"Dublin."

"Zaire?"

"Kinshasa."

"Honduras?"

"Tegucigalpa."

"Excellent!" I exclaimed, simultaneously realizing that it was this unusual talent for geography that was his punch line.

"I don't know why, it just comes to me," he said, snapping his fingers as the ends of his lips turned downward, with pride. "I know all the states and capitals in the U.S. and Mexico, too." The pleasure apparent in his now-radiant face contrasted sharply with the studied nonchalance he had displayed at the beginning of our conversation.

"She took me just like I was, you know, like I don't want to be pushed to do things, like I need time to think about it," he con-

tinued, explaining his relationship with Sister Mary Agnes. Most importantly, she let him use her computer with the world atlas software on it.

"I liked it so much! It'd be just me 'n her after school sometimes," he reminisced.

Stimulated by his year with Sister Mary Agnes, Mark has become an avid map collector. During his family's summer trip to and from Mexico, he applied his newly developed talent by assuming primary responsibility for navigating. To encourage his interest, Mark's parents promised to buy him a world atlas for his next birthday.

He regretted losing touch with his former teacher, paying her homage with his description: She was "*really, really* cool," with all her students. "No one here is like the Sister," he added, softly. "She liked you no matter how you were or how you looked." I asked Mark whether he had a map for his life. He said that he would like to do something connected with maps or travel.

"The Sister said that I could be a plane pilot and I liked that," he said, smiling.

"So you'll need to go to college first," I suggested.

"Yeah, she talked to me about that, too."

I hoped that Mark would really do as I asked when we parted—keep reaching for the sky.

Sister Mary Agnes' capacity to accept her students unconditionally had a profound impact on Mark's life. This aura of acceptance lured him into her sphere; but it was the nun's quick apprehension that Mark needed a chance to work alone and at his own pace that brought out the very best in him. Mark learned much more than world geography from Sister Mary Agnes. Her authentically caring attitude set him free to discover some important things about himself. Not only was he an unusually talented geographer, he was also a special person, capable and worthy of the friendship of the "*really, really* cool" Sister Mary Agnes.

It remains to be seen whether Mark will experience any similarly affirming relationships during his years at Seguin. The thinness of his aloofness and the strength of his newfound talent provide some hope that another perceptive teacher will continue where Sister Mary Agnes left off. Until this happens, Mark's peer group will be his most prominent source of school-based connectedness.

However understandable, even justifiable, students' "uncaring" attitudes can make them not merely vulnerable, but virtually invisible, as Mark's and now Ronny's case demonstrates. I met Ronny, a tall, heavy-set, wannabe gangster with a short-cropped crew cut, during a visit I made to his ninth-grade English class. He denies being in a gang, but his two best friends are known to be involved in gang activity. Ronny has been a good reader since elementary school, but he fails to complete half of his homework assignments because they bore him. At home, he reads mystery novels. At school, he shares the stories' plotlines with his friends, who think he's smart.

The English teacher tells me that Ronny never speaks a word in class, though he attends daily. Holding stacks of papers to grade, the teacher sighs, "He just sits there in the corner, and I figure I'll leave him alone if he leaves me alone." Ronny's tough appearance makes him seem unapproachable, even to other students; his teachers never call on him. Ronny prefers the status quo. When I see him later, during his lunch hour, we converse and he is surprisingly friendly. I ask him why he even goes to class if he doesn't participate. He said that he had always "gotten by" with just going to class.

"For all my teachers, it has always been enough—and it's funny how they never, never call on me."

"Maybe because you look scary," I think to myself. "But you're a smart guy," I insist, "why don't you give school greater importance?"

"Well, my friends think I'm smart, but I'm not so sure."

"Don't you like to learn?" I ask.

"It's not that I don't want to learn, it's *what* I learn that matters. Maybe I'm lazy, but teachers could also make school more fun. And besides, I'm doing what I have to do to not flunk and I never do flunk."

"Since you know how to pass and heat the system, why don't you think about going to college?" I ask him.

"I don't think I could do it. My cousin went. He even had a scholarship and he dropped out after the first semester . . . said it was too hard. He graduated from here, too, and he's smarter than me so I don't think I could handle it."

I spent a few more minutes trying to get him to reconsider his

decision about college. He told me that he had not really decided against college. He simply did not know enough about it to make an informed decision. I was the first person who had ever talked to him seriously about this possibility.

Ronny's teachers are well positioned to advise him about college but his demeanor and his attire reduce the chances that such a discussion might ever take place. Students like Ronny, those who are subdued and do not cause trouble, are among the easiest to overlook, regardless of their potential. Of further significance is Ronny's disconnectedness from his English class, despite his continued interest in reading. Because schools fail to create environments that nurture the kinds of meaningful experiences that would allow learning to follow naturally, important opportunities for growth are missed (McNeil 1988; Smith 1995). As schooling is currently structured at Seguin, alienation and tension between students and school personnel is ongoing and unavoidable. This corrosive daily atmosphere negates the possibility of creating the collective contexts that facilitate the transmission of knowledge, skills, and resources.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE CARING AND EDUCATION LITERATURE

The literature on caring is properly premised on the notion that individuals need to be recognized and addressed as whole beings. All people share a basic need to be understood, appreciated, and respected. Among many acculturated, U.S.-born, Mexican American youth at Seguin, however, these basic needs go unmet during the hours at which they are in school. These students' culturally assimilated status only exacerbates the problems inherent in an institutional relationship that defines them as in need of continuing socialization (DeVillar 1994).

My findings show that American urban youth culture, filtered through a Mexican American ethnic minority experience, is at odds with adults' tastes and preferences in dress and self-representation. This generational divide combines with a subtractive schooling experience to heighten students' sense of disconnectedness from school and also to remind them of their lack of power.

Rodrigo conveys teens' sense of powerlessness at school in his observation that "Kids have good arguments, but they have absolutely no argument skills." Unable to articulate their frustration and alienation effectively, and inexperienced with even the idea of collective action, most regular-track students settle for individual-level resistance. They engage in random acts of rebellion, posture and pose, mentally absent themselves, physically absent themselves, or attend and participate in only those classes that interest them. The few students who *are* adept articulators, like Rodrigo, condemn schooling, not education.

The maladaptive consequences of subtractive schooling are magnified among immigrant youth who try to acculturate very rapidly. The suggestion by one parent that the school should help youth sort out their cultural issues as they undergo change is echoed by Spindler and Spindler (1994), who contend that schools should engage explicitly in cultural therapy. They suggest that culturally appropriate training might allow teachers to help students better understand themselves and thus make it possible for youth to learn "with less rancor and resistance." (p. xiv)

By examining misunderstandings of caring, a fundamental source of students' alienation and resistance becomes apparent. Schools like Seguin not only fail to validate their students' culture, they also subtract resources from them, first by impeding the development of authentic caring; and secondly, by obliging youth to participate in a non-neutral, power-draining type of aesthetic caring. To make schools truly caring institutions for members of historically oppressed subordinate groups like Mexican Americans, authentic caring, as currently described in the literature, is necessary but not sufficient. Students' cultural world and their structural position must also be fully apprehended, with school-based adults deliberately bringing issues of race, difference, and power into central focus. This approach necessitates abandoning the notion of a color-blind curriculum and a neutral assimilation process. The practice of individualizing collective problems must also be relinquished. A more profound and involved understanding of the socioeconomic, linguistic, sociocultural, and structural barriers that obstruct the mobility of Mexican youth needs to inform all caring relationships (Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba 1991; Phelan et al. 1993;

Stanton-Salazar 1996). Authentic caring cannot exist unless it is imbued with and motivated by such political clarity (Bartolomé 1994).

The finding that students oppose schooling rather than education expands current explanations for oppositional or reactive subcultures that characterize many urban, U.S.-born youth in inner-city schools. Rather than signifying an anti-achievement ethos, oppositional elements constitute a response to a Eurocentric, middle-class “culture of power” (see Delpit 1994, for a similar argument with respect to African American underachievement). This culture individualizes the problem of underachievement through its adherence to a power-neutral or power-blind conception of the world (Frankenberg 1993; Twine 1995; McIntyre 1997). So deeply rooted and poorly apprehended is this culture of power that a 50–75 percent dropout rate at Seguí is systematically rationalized—year after year—as an individual-level problem. Such explanations preserve current institutional arrangements and asymmetries of power.

Noddings (1992) rightly argues that the current crisis of meaning, direction, and purpose among youth in public schools derives from a poor ordering of priorities. The current emphases on achievement and on standard academic subjects may lead youth to conclude that adults do not care for them. Noddings further acknowledges that her call for a re-ordering of priorities to promote dedication to full human growth necessarily means that not all youth be given exactly the same kind of education. Indeed, as the logic of authentic caring dictates, a complete apprehension of the “other” means that the material, physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of youth will guide the educational process.

One final story, that of Mr. Sosa, Seguí’s band director from 1991–1994, illustrates how authentic caring can be infused with political clarity, and thus serves as a fitting conclusion to this chapter. To meet the particular needs of his students, Mr. Sosa dissolves the conventional boundary that exists between “public” school and “private” home and community matters. Rather than construing a collective matter (poor nutrition) as an individual problem, Mr. Sosa adjusted his pedagogy in a humane and culturally sensitive way to meet all of his students’ needs. The

marching band’s successes are a testimony to the effectiveness of meaningful relationships in promoting competence and mastery of worldly tasks.

LOVE IS ONE TAQUITO AWAY

In a late-morning visit with Mr. Sosa in early fall 1992, he told me that when he first arrived at Seguí (two years earlier), the students did not respect him. They were unmanageable. He said that they “just didn’t know,” meaning that they had to learn what his expectations were. He explained to me that in order for this kind of learning to take place, he first had to earn his students’ respect and confidence. He emphasized that this happened “slowly.” He recalled a series of three football games during which three different girls fainted while participating in the marching band’s half-time show.

At the football stadium where the football players play, there is a lot of dust in the air. It just comes up and it happens that the kids start breathing it. So, there are kids that are malnourished. They don’t eat any breakfast, lunch, and then they don’t have supper. Then they go to participate. They are weak already, and that dust doesn’t help any.

These students who fainted were taken by EMS [Emergency Medical Service] for treatment at the hospital and hospitalized. . . . Some kids are still being billed for that. . . . These kids don’t have insurance. They take them to the hospital, and they’re administered treatment, and the parents don’t have any money to pay. Yet, if they don’t have any money, they are not going to be administered. Some that are administered are billed without the parents having any money. So, I try to get insurance for them, but it’s only accidental insurance through the school. It’s cheap, but I can’t find any insurance that will take care of their hospital stay.

He pointed to a large, bright-blue, vinyl bag that he brings to school every day. It is packed with bean- and meat-filled, flour tortilla tacos wrapped in foil. He gives this food to his students. “At first, I would come to school with a little bag. Now, I bring this one because I can feed many more students with it. I used to

begin handing them out during the lunch hour. Now I begin earlier than that. They come here to eat breakfast," he says, with a smile.

I remark that he must spend a lot of time preparing these meals. Nodding his head, he responds, "I spend one-and-a-half to two hours every night making these. He then pulls out a *taquito* (small taco) and offers it to me. I'm dying to taste Mr. Sosa's *taquitos* and so I accept his hospitality. He gives me one of his prized bean-and-meat versions, which I savor slowly as we talk. Mr. Sosa tells me how his gift of food helped create a strong bond between him and his students:

I usually finish by ten-thirty or eleven. A big part of the trust that I have been able to build has been because of this. At first, they were overly defensive with me. If you tell them something they don't like, they are ready to hit back. Now, I can go ahead and tell them to do things which they don't understand, but they will do them anyway. That's what I'm up to with them, but it has taken almost two years.

"So feeding your students has really made a difference in your relationship with them?" I probe.

"It all happened by accident," he responds. You see, the food thing, I don't bring it just to win them over. It was because they don't eat. They don't have any money. They don't even have breakfast . . . don't have money for dinner. And then we practice 'til five or six after school. So, consequently their physical endurance is spent. I really got after the kids, to try to get them to eat something. I then would do my part by bringing them food, and then I would have them talk in here while they are eating. I would give them advice. Some kids come in and sit down and talk to me about personal things. Just last week, I pulled a kid out of jail. This changed everything around for me because when I first came in and tried to tell them things that are not exactly the way they've been told by other students and by other teachers, they resented me.

"So, to reach these kids, what is your advice to other teachers?" I ask him.

Characteristically, he answers my question by telling me another story:

When I first got here in 1990, this is what actually happened. I came and was interviewed by the principal. The principal was outside and he called some of the band students that were there. They were practicing there by themselves because they didn't have a band director. He had left. So, he called the kids around to where we both were and he introduced me as their possible new teacher. So, one of the girls put her arms around me. *Me abrazó*. [She hugged me.] And she assumed that I was going to be their teacher and director. She told me in front of everybody, "Sir, just one thing. Don't lie to us." So, it kind of hit me. These kids want the truth. They want sincerity. For the teacher, it's one thing to say you care and it's another to show it. You can show your sincerity, your honesty, when you talk to them or you can demonstrate that you are sincere and that you care.

Recently, some kid told me when I offered him some food, he said, "I don't take handouts." So, I told the boy, "This is not a handout. It took a lot of love. It took not only my own money, but my own time." I'll spend an hour or two making, preparing this food, plus buying the materials I need every day. So, it's not a matter of being a handout. It's a matter of love. They are like my children to me. It's not a handout. It's like giving something without expecting something in return. I don't expect something in return.

To complete the story, Mr. Sosa led his band to the city championship title for three consecutive years. They also competed well at the state level and the band had the privilege of participating in the "16th of September" parade in Mexico City for two consecutive years. Mr. Sosa's story, the example he set as a caring human being, would be moving under any circumstances at any high school. At Seguin, where the importance of personal worth is often overlooked, where the links between academic achievement, cultural integrity, and mutual respect are so fragile, and where helpfulness and hopefulness are often in short supply, Mr. Sosa reminds us that a different, more affirming and positive world may be only a *taquito* away—that is, if it is one made with sincerity and love.