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Between School and Work: The Literacies of Urban Adolescent Females

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NOTE: At the time of publication, the author Katherine Schultz was affiliated with the University of Delaware. Currently, April 2007, she is a faculty member of the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania.

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Abstract

This article argues for a broader conception of both school and work literacies. I present the writing and narratives of adolescent females in their senior year of an urban high school to begin a dialogue about the ways schools and communities can support youth to both imagine and plan for their futures. Ethnographic research methods were used to collect narratives and construct case studies of four young women. In their nuanced pictures of youth, these narratives will inform educators, policy makers, and researchers as they write about and make decisions concerning the futures of these young people.

Comments

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Between School and Work: The Literacies of Urban Adolescent Females

KATHERINE SCHULTZ
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This article argues for a broader conception of both school and work literacies. I present the writing and narratives of adolescent females in their senior year of an urban high school to begin a dialogue about the ways schools and communities can support youth to both imagine and plan for their futures. Ethnographic research methods were used to collect narratives and construct case studies of four young women. In their nuanced pictures of youth, these narratives will inform educators, policy makers, and researchers as they write about and make decisions concerning the futures of these young people.

In an essay written in response to an article and a class discussion about whether welfare benefits should be cut for teenagers with children, a discussion that becomes even more poignant in the current political climate, Tanya, an African American senior in high school, wrote:

The most interesting thing I learned today was that the teen welfare rate is global. It must be in order to make Cover story of Newsweek. This is nothing new to me, I see it every day its so common. It doesn't effect me because I'm trying to avoid welfare. I want to be able to say I never applied for welfare and never had it. I want to work for my money and for my children.

I could have been a teen mother twice but I know thats not the life I want for me or my children.¹

In this excerpt of a longer essay Tanya expressed the desires of many of the young women I met during my year of research in an urban high school. In this essay she not only imagined a future brighter than her present life; she claimed the agency to enact this future. Tanya's vision of her future shaped her participation in school during her senior year.

Tanya, like many of her peers, had a difficult junior year in high school. She missed many days of school, choosing instead to spend the day with friends at the mall or someone's home, often using drugs. When she was at school she was, in her teacher's words, "rebellious" and "outspoken." Her will often clashed with her teachers' as she tested and challenged. Tanya could have easily been written off. A ward of the state, she lived in foster homes and with relatives during her last few years of high school. At times her home difficulties made it nearly impossible for her to concentrate on and attend school. But she wasn't written off; her teachers kept working with her to engage her in school

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learning. They recognized her intelligence and perseverance, despite her frequent harsh comments to them.

Tanya is bright and articulate. During her senior year she decided she wanted to go to college. As a ward of the state, Tanya was required to attend classes at a local community college that gave her information and the skills to fill out the requisite forms and applications to attend a four-year school. She explained that her goal for the future was to be successful and live in the safe suburbs. At the start of the year she attended school nearly every day and turned her assignments in on time. On the day the honor roll was posted outside the cafeteria, she slipped out of class to see her name on the list and returned a few times to confirm it was there. As a result of her own drive to succeed, combined with the advice and support from a variety of sources, Tanya applied to colleges and was accepted at her first choice, a state university, under an equal opportunities program.² Throughout her senior year Tanya continued to periodically lash out at her classmates or teachers; for the most part, however, she made the decision to keep herself in check and follow the rules.

When I asked Tanya in the middle of the year if she had to change her identity to become engaged in school, she replied that "it's cool now" (meaning in her senior year) to be on the honor roll. "It used to mean that someone was a nerd," she explained. She added that people who don't try in school are stupid—they're not going to get anywhere. After her acceptance to college, Tanya began to miss school and talk about problems at home, fights she was in with other females at school, and difficulties with her boyfriend. She became increasingly distracted and edgy with her teachers. In the last few months of the school year Tanya missed enough school that she placed herself in jeopardy for graduation. With encouragement and support from a variety of sources, including her teachers, she managed to graduate with her class and complete her first year at the university. She returned for her third year in September 1996.

I have begun to see these contrasting ways of going to school—at once engaged and disengaged—as akin to shifting tides. Pulled by a sense of the impending future, in their senior year many students in this high school choose to participate in school so that they have a chance for their publicly voiced goal—admission into college—and at the same time chose to resist school, acting out of an often private conviction or fear that they are unprepared to leave high school. Tanya's story, a variation of a theme I heard again and again, exemplifies the tug students described as they made the transition between school and work: the tug to succeed and the pull to give in to failure. Her story illustrates the shifting identities of the youth I met, who simultaneously acknowledged and denied their agency to act on their futures.

In the popular press, youth violence and membership in gangs are frequently blamed on a feeling of hopelessness; youth living in poor

neighborhoods are quoted saying they don't know whether they will live until their 18th birthday. With such a dim view of their future, as well as school curricula that make few connections to the exigencies of their lives, urban youth drop out of school and society at an alarming rate. In the urban school where I spent a year with students who had made it to their senior year, I heard plenty of stories of despair: stories of gang violence and poverty; stories of blame and diminished expectations. One student knew nobody with a job. At the same time, despite their doubts and feelings of hopelessness, a surprising number of students, such as Tanya, made plans for their futures.

In this article I present narratives of female students in transition from school to work, to begin a dialogue about the ways that schools and communities can support youth to both imagine and plan for their future. I use students' writing about their current lives and their visions for the future to argue for a broader conception of both school and work literacies, one that accounts for both who the students are and their aspirations. I describe the ways in which writing acted as a bridge between home and school communities, and, for some students, the ways writing helped them to envision a world different from the one they inhabited.

Students' disengagement from academic learning in urban schools is one of the most difficult problems facing urban educators today. There have been numerous theories about the causes: families, teachers, poverty, the economy, poorly equipped schools—even the students themselves have been variously blamed. Few of these theories look to the students themselves as sources of information about their educational experience (McCarthy 1993). Building on a description of the ways in which students in their senior year of high school use writing to express the multiple worlds they inhabit and imagine for their future, this article suggests that as educators we join with students to construct schooling that gives them resources and support to imagine and plan for their futures and, in the process, reconceptualize our understanding of the literacies required for work.

Theoretical Frame

Literacies in Urban Schools

This research takes the theoretical perspective that the acquisition and use of literacy is a sociocultural and cognitive process that varies within and across groups of people (see Cook-Gumperz 1986; Dyson and Freedman 1990; Scribner and Cole 1981). In contrast to the traditional view of literacy as a set of decontextualized skills, a more accurate conceptualization of literacy suggests that it is a range of practices specific to groups and individuals of different cultures, races, classes, and genders (Lytle and Wolfe 1989). Individuals and groups differ in their complex histories of literacy use in their daily lives—at school, at

home, in their communities and at work—and in their purposes for engaging in formal learning (de Castell et al. 1986; Lytle 1991; Street 1984).

These conceptions of literacy have informed my study of the literacy practices of graduating seniors in an urban high school. In this study I used written and spoken literacies to examine students' perspectives as they described the conditions under which they learned literacy and became high school graduates. Thus, in this research, literacy describes both the words the students spoke and wrote, and the ways in which students participated in school literacy tasks. Historically, literacy acquisition has been defined as the process of becoming lettered or the attainment of knowledge about and use of letters. This definition implies that the process of becoming literate includes the acquisition of both skill and power (Fingeret 1988). Such a notion has bearing on the youth in this study, who, through their participation in school literacy, both seek and shun this power.

Urban high schools have frequently been described as sites of resistance and conflict. Numerous studies have examined the relevance of cultural and social reproduction theories as explanations for the actions and often the failure of youth in these schools (Everhart 1983; Willis 1977). Studies have focused on class, gender, and more recently race and ethnicity as significant factors in both the description and explanation of school life (Foster 1992; Jacob and Jordan 1993; Ogbu 1993). These studies have featured both macro- and microanalyses of school culture and classroom activities. Explanations for the failures of minority youths have rested on macroanalyses of historical, economic and political contingencies that shape schools and the practices of schooling (Gibson 1993; Ogbu 1992), while microanalyses have often focused on sociolinguistic analyses of classroom discourse (Cazden 1986; Erickson 1993; Jacob and Jordan 1993; Mehan 1979).

Studies of literacy in urban schools have often focused on the production of texts and relied on the examination of literacy practices inside and outside of school settings. For instance, Camitta (1993) compared out-of-school texts, which she terms *vernacular literacy*, with texts produced in school to illustrate the ways in which this unofficial literacy functions as the discourse of social life. In her study of storytelling rights Shuman (1986, 1993) describes literacy practices at home and at school and the ways adolescents use writing and speaking to categorize their lives. Heath and McLaughlin's (1993) current work in after school programs describes the ways in which the multiple races and identities of inner-city youth give them multiple voices and resources.

Women, Schooling, and Work

Combining excerpts from diaries and secondary sources, Clifford (1982) provides a historical context within which to examine questions related to women's schooling and work. She documents the changes in

women's participation in the workforce and in schooling and concludes that for women, their gender, more than their class, race or ethnicity, family background, or geographic location, has determined the kinds of occupations they choose, their patterns of entering and leaving the workforce over time, their earnings, their opportunities for promotion, and their vulnerability to unemployment.

Ethnographic studies have added to our understanding of the ways in which gender, class, and race or ethnicity shape the experience of adolescents in schools and at work. Initial studies of youth cultures in schools, such as Willis's (1977) study of white working-class boys, were written as a critique of theories of social and cultural reproduction (e.g., Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bowles and Gintis 1976). Subsequent studies of the cultures created by adolescent working-class girls (e.g., McRobbie 1978) suggest that the ideology of romance shapes their collective identities and decisions about schooling and work. In her study of a vocational program designed to prepare white working-class girls for clerical jobs, Valli (1986, 1988) uncovered similar aspirations; the girls in her study projected romance, followed by marriage and part-time work, into their futures to justify their unsatisfying career choices in the present. In their study of black and white women in universities, Holland and Eisenhart (1988, 1990) discovered a new twist to this same pattern: as the women in their study became discouraged with their school work, they increasingly focused their interests and identity on the world of romance.

Two studies examine white working-class youth in the context of the current, changing economy. In contrast to previous studies, Weis (1988, 1990) found in her research that among the high school girls who lived in a city undergoing deindustrialization, which led to joblessness for many of the working-class men, wage labor and future education figured as a primary rather than secondary goals. The shift from a manufacturing to a service economy, according to Borman (1991), has placed adolescents entering the workforce in a particularly disadvantaged position. In her study of young workers in their first jobs after leaving high school, Borman found that the jobs these mostly working-class youth attained required that they act middle class even though they were paid less than blue-collar wages. Reaching a conclusion similar to Clifford's (1982), Borman suggested that gender is the central in "determining the locus and nature of workplace experience for young workers" (1991:133-134), although race and class play significant roles.

In a recent study of French and Algerian working-class females in a vocational high school located outside of Paris, Raissiguier (1994) explored the ways in which students' identities were shaped by race, class, and gender. She defined identity as an individual or group reconstruction of a personal history in the context of that person or group's location and mediated through culture and the discursive context, arguing that the language and discourse of schools are connected to identity forma-

tion. Hull (1993a) has described a vocational program at a community college, the goal of which is to prepare the mostly female, minority students for entry-level jobs in the data center of a bank. When she followed the few students who found jobs, Hull discovered that there was little relationship between the skills they had learned in the community college program and their success in the workplace, and little connection between their ability to accomplish the work and their opportunity to stay employed. Workers were fired for arriving minutes late; the data center seemed to rely on a steady supply of short-term workers. Hull concluded that the rhetoric about the lack of skills and preparation for work should be informed by studies of the transformation of work, which she suggests should be conducted alongside studies of the transformation of schooling.

This article discusses the writing and talk of urban high-school females, youth of color from working and nonworking poor families, to explore their visions of the future to argue for a reconceptualization of our notions of school and work literacies. So-called minority females are said to begin with two strikes against them when they plan for their futures: their race and their gender—and, in the case of the youth in this study, their class as well. In addition, their voices are underrepresented in discussions of school-to-work transitions. My goal is to begin from what Harding (1991) and others call the “standpoint” of those whose views and voices are often ignored. Like Harding, I try to link these perspectives to the larger social, historical, and economic processes in which they are located. In this article I focus on the ways in which living in an impoverished urban area of the United States in the 1990s, urban females use literacies to connect school to their home communities, to their work, and to their futures.

I chose to focus on urban females students of color because they are underrepresented in studies about the transitions from school to work (Raissiguier 1994). Early British studies of the cultures created by adolescent working-class girls suggest that the ideology of romance shaped their collective identities and decisions about schooling and work (Deem 1980; Griffin 1985; McRobbie 1978). More recent studies in the United States describe the role of romance and anticipation of marriage in shaping girls' participation in their own education (e.g., Holland and Eisenhart 1990; Valli 1986). This vision of romance and the notion of husbands providing for their wives is worlds apart from the realities of the lives of the poor females of color in my study. When these young women spoke of their future, they rarely mentioned males, and all assumed that they would be responsible for supporting themselves.³ In many urban schools it is the female students of color who are more often staying in school rather than dropping out, and in this article I argue that their ways of talking about the future can inform researchers and policy makers concerned about the education of urban youth.

Research Context

During the 1993–94 school year I spent three to five days a week in an urban high school, where I attended two senior government classes and, once a week, an advisory period and English class with the same students. Located on the West Coast, this high school has a population that is approximately 40 percent African American, 40 percent Latina/Latino, and 15 percent Asian American.⁴ Seventy-nine percent of the students in this school come from families on AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children.) Accurate dropout and retention statistics are not maintained by either the school or the district, and the population of the school tends to be transient. Students described the auditorium as overflowing when they met as tenth graders, their first year of high school ($n = 716$). By graduation, barely half of the same room was filled with the senior class ($n = 354$).

As part of a fledgling restructuring effort, this high school is divided into career houses: architecture, business, international relations, government, English as a second language, health and environmental sciences, humanities, industry and technology, and media. Students chose their houses in their tenth-grade year and stayed with the same set of teachers and students throughout the three years of high school. Major classes (English, social studies, science, math, and physical education) are taught by a group of teachers who worked together as a team. The classes I observed were all in the health and environmental sciences house, which meant that most students had either selected careers related to those fields, had friends in that house, or chose the house because they wanted to have particular teachers. I chose to observe students mainly in the senior social studies class in the health house because of the excellent reputation of a particular teacher and her interest in and willingness to work collaboratively with a university-based researcher. While the initial questions were my own, we talked regularly about each of our observations, and I shared field notes and writing with her.

In the first year of the study, data collection included participant-observation; open-ended and semistructured interviews with most of the females in the two classes, more frequent interviews with about 20 other students and teachers, and regular interviews with 9 focal students; and the collection of written documents from classrooms and around the school, including student essays and yearbooks, student newspapers and magazines, official and unofficial school documents, essays, teacher-constructed assignments, posters, popular magazines, and memos; and student-conducted interviews and diaries. During the second year the focus was on a group of ten students who graduated from high school and were looking for or working in a job or attending community college or vocational school. Periodic interviews with these youth were combined with observations of their workplaces to gather a picture of the literacy practices needed to obtain and keep the entry-level

jobs available to them. In addition, the youth were asked to keep journals to document their job searches and changing goals. For this research I combine macrolevel analyses of curriculum and instruction, community and culture, with microlevel investigations of oral and written discourse.

There was a recurring process of data analysis throughout the project to uncover patterns of thought and behavior and key literacy events of literacy for in-depth analysis (Bogdan and Biklen 1982; Erickson 1986) using multiple methods including conversational analysis, narrative analysis, and sociocultural and historical analyses. Complete transcripts of interviews and hundreds of pages of field notes were reviewed and analyzed for patterns. The patterns were then checked against the data and with the informants themselves. The various sources of data, including observations, interviews, and student writing, were combined to construct case studies. Each case study was developed to illustrate different aspects of the focusing question: What is the nature of the young women's participation in the literacy activities of their schools, communities, and workplaces? In this article I present four case studies to illustrate these findings. The case studies of Denise and Mary focus on school and home literacy practices, while the case studies of Lianne and Jo connect school practices to their education for the workplace.

When I began this research, I set out to document the literacy practices that females in their senior year of high school brought to school from their homes and communities and those practices they learned in school. In the second year of the project my plan was to follow a handful of students into the workplace and document the literacy practices they needed to obtain and keep jobs. By the end of the first year of the project, to my surprise I found that nearly all of the females who had made it to their senior year had plans to go to college or vocational school rather than directly into the workforce. Thus, in the course of my research, my question changed. Rather than focusing on the literacy practices that female students brought with them into their future workplaces, I redirected my research questions to look at the ways students use literacy to help them imagine and plan for their futures. This focus enabled me to take a new and critical look at the accepted notions of school and work literacies (see Hull 1993a; 1993b).

Findings: Imagining/Acting on the Future

In order to present the initial findings of this study, I highlight the case studies of four students—Denise, Mary, Lianne, and Jo—whose spoken and written narratives illustrate a range of ways that students participated in (and resisted) school as they wrote about themselves, their present lives, and their futures. While the writing and talk of the first student, Denise, focuses on the present, the writing and talk of the final student, Jo, is oriented toward the future. Each case study points to the possibilities and limitations contained in many current descriptions of the literacies of schooling and work.

Denise: "If I Don't Write, All I Think about Are the Deaths in The World Today"

Denise, an African American female, sees herself as an athlete. She grew up with numerous brothers and spends most of her time on the basketball court. When asked on the first day of school in her junior year to write in a log or journal about what she had learned the previous year in a world cultures course, Denise simply wrote, "I learned that Mr. Ashton is a fag." She retained this resistant and angry stance throughout most of her junior year and frequently refused to write an entry in her log when assigned by her teacher. As a senior, although she continued to refuse to participate in group projects, Denise was less resistant to writing in a social studies class. Nonetheless, she refused to join her classmates in the monthlong preparation for a mock hearing on the Bill of Rights because she didn't want to perform in front of other people. During that entire month she sat apart from the other students and completed projects for her other classes, trading her refusal to participate for a failing grade.

Following a discussion about freedom of speech that was a result of the mock hearings, Denise's U.S. government teacher showed the class a segment from the *McNeil-Lehrer News Hour* on gangster rap. Most of the participants on this show—mainly prominent members of the African American community—took a position against this genre of music. After a heated discussion, Denise's teacher asked the class to write a log (a journal entry) that detailed their opinions about the show. The next day the class discussed a variety of student logs that their teacher had typed and distributed. They were asked to form groups and choose the writing that represented a viewpoint with which they either strongly agreed or disagreed. During this discussion, Denise, with uncharacteristic boldness, stood up and claimed her essay about the topic. She had written:

Rap Controversy

This specific show I dont agree with. . . . Well I feel they could say whatever they want because I know who I am and thats all that Matters. About People rapping about Killing. I think theyre just telling us about the society and whats happening in it today. They're just getting to the point. In the how they were just talking about males dissing females. Well the females diss the males too. The Government shouldnt focus on Rap, He should focus on something more critical like Guns and Drugs, because thats a major problem and Rap is just a minor problem, Not even that.

In this writing Denise asserted her right to state her own positions alongside the rappers. Although her teachers frequently described her as "lost," here she loudly proclaimed who she was and what she believed.

Rap was a theme for Denise's senior project, a play she called *Gangsta Lean* after a popular rap song with the same title. This play was originally written for her junior high school drama teacher, who, with Denise's occasional assistance, ran an afternoon youth program. Denise worked with this teacher to produce the play, which was based on an actual event from Denise's life, the shooting death of her young cousin. Her own brother, a student at the junior high school, took the lead role written for him, a character shot in a drug-related incident at a dice game. Denise used both her own name for the sister in the play and her brother's name for the character who was shot, which seemed to underline the real nature of this fictionalized event. Denise included one of her many poems about her grandmother that she had written on her own at home as the eulogy in the play. One day, with no words of explanation, Denise gave a copy of the play to the high school drama teacher. The teacher was impressed by the play—its real-life dialogue and honest depiction of urban life—and decided to give it to her class to perform, with the assistance of two visiting teachers. The drama class performed the play twice—both times to a nearly full auditorium—during school and in an evening performance attended by reporters from a local newspaper. Denise received recognition for the play and was given a senior award for her creativity.

Denise both writes and speaks the truth. While the play was about an actual event in her life and used the names of people in her family, she was not interested in acting in the play. In fact, Denise resisted any public performance and absolutely refused to do any assignments that required her to speak in front of the class. Rather than presenting her senior project to a panel of teachers and students, Denise opted to make a tape that she gave to her English teacher. On the tape she spoke these words:

Growing up in [California]. Me, my mother and my brothers. It wasn't easy. It's not easy. And it ain't going to be easy. Every time I walk home from school, I don't feel safe. Not at all. I start to think of my family and all the friends I have seen killed, that have been killed. And I also think about the one that might be killed. When a car goes past me, my neck shrugs as if I am going to be shot. It's a terrible, terrible feeling. People ask me what I think about what's going on in the world today. Sometimes I don't answer, but others, I cry and I say, the world is just hell on earth. But every day I leave my house telling my mother I love her because I don't know whether I'll see her again. This world is a world of fear and hate. That is what led me to be a writer.

While writing I don't feel nothing. I don't think about nothing, I don't hear nothing. All I think about is writing. If I don't write, all I think about is the deaths in the world today. So to keep my mind off of that, I write. It's not easy to be a writer. You have to have your mind set on being a writer. You have to know how to write. It's a lot of have tos in the world today.

Writing my play was not quite easy. When I was writing my play, all I thought about was my play and how it was going to come out. I made the mistake of letting people help me. And when I did that I had to go back and rewrite it. But that's all right. Writers have to go through things like that. Some

writers have to go over their formats a million times. When writing a play popped into my mind, all I thought about was the painful things that I see in the world today. So I started to write about one. Which was of my cousin Johnny. So, I started to write. And I couldn't stop. It felt like I was being trapped. I was being held captive. And believe me, I know what that feels like.

Denise used writing both to describe and to escape the present. She strongly believed that writing should reflect reality, and in many ways her writing was more straightforward and honest than her public self. By writing her present, Denise was able to "get along with her life" and move into the future.

This writing comes from a student who is frequently described by her teachers as "at risk" because she often didn't participate in class projects and appeared to be drifting through school without taking charge of her education. Her future plans reflect this confusion. She claims that she wants to be both a doctor and a lawyer, perhaps a doctor who does sports medicine, since she enjoys sports. She is not eager to go to school and does not seem to understand, nor want to hear, that her professional education will take numerous years. Yet when engaged in her own writing and selected academic tasks, Denise writes and speaks powerfully.

Most often Denise claims that she is not a writer and does not want to pursue writing in any serious way in her future. She resists efforts that others make to help her. In her senior essay on American dramatists, however, the required companion piece to her play, she wrote the following:

As a young American writer I am not known to write a lot but if I sat down for a whole day with nothing else to do, I would write until my hands fall off. I admire Langston Hughes mostly because of his abilities and efforts to sit down and try to make young Americans write more often. The world would be a better place if we had a lot more dramatists than we do because Drama is based on reality. The meaning of drama to me is to show your feelings, to make people see what the world is today. I think more people would write if they knew what it could get them and what results would come out of writing.

Among the many things that Denise resists in school is a display of her feelings. Yet her tape, her play, her poems, and this essay are packed with emotion. She lives in a troubled and troubling world, and in rare moments of her writing she shares these troubles. Her writing is solitary and reflects her own struggles to address her current predicament.

Mary: "I Feel That 'Taggers' Really Have Art in Them"

Mary is Filipino American. During her government class in her senior year, she constantly worked to perfect her lettering. She had two reasons for this handwriting practice. The first was that a group of male Filipino friends were tutoring her to "tag" (write graffiti). They gave her a

prescribed set of exercises to follow and practice in a notebook. For instance, she was instructed to design a tag—her individual signature—and to trace it again and again. She was informed that she would not be given the opportunity to paint her tag until she had perfected it. The second reason is that Mary is also an artist who spent her free time in the high school art room and was interested in handwriting as a form of graphic design. She used her interest and talent in graphic art and set design to participate in class projects. For example, one day she asked her teacher if she could copy from the board and enlarge a chart they had constructed for a class exercise. At the time, my assumption was that she had volunteered to make the poster for extra credit because she had received a D- on the test returned that day. Rather than rebelling and resisting further instruction when she saw her grade, a typical response of her peers, Mary volunteered to use her well-developed graphic skills to compensate for her poor grade.

For a senior project Mary wrote about art and constructed an origami display of a wedding cake, complete with a bride and groom. Up until the last day before the projects were due, she was uncertain as to whether she would actually turn in the cake she had carefully made, perhaps reflecting her ambivalence about the successful completion of the project and graduation. She began the written version of her project with the following: "Art, who can explain it. It has many meanings that I may accept, and you may not. Art is there for your own interpretation." She continued:

There are many forms of art that come from different countries. In Mexico, they make pottery and piñatas for fun. The piñatas are used to enlighten a child's birthday party. In Europe, the famous artists use paintings to express their feelings and it eventually became our standard by which we judge art. In [the city where I live], (and many other cities in California) the so called "taggers" produce a different kind of art. It is the only way to express themselves, but some people think that the graffiti they put on the walls is a waste of time and destructive. I feel that "taggers" really have art in them, and they want to put it out for the world to see, but society has the tendency to criticize them, and the art of graffiti will never be displayed.

Many art forms need to be looked at for what it is saying. Even though art looks destructive, and a waste of time, you need to see what the message is. Every kind of art has a special message to it. As long as you understand what it stands for, and what it means, then you know the true value of art.

In this essay Mary explained graffiti, which can be seen as one of the most visible acts of resistance and rebellion—dis-identification with authority—in an academic or school context.

I asked Mary how she thought about the future and she replied, "Not good." I persisted: "Why do you say that?" She answered:

Umm, well if it's going to get good, it's going to take me a while to get that, because my brother died in '92 and we're like broke now, and so if I want to

go to college, I have to get a job after school and get money and try to start off at junior college and then from there I got to work again and get my money for when I transfer to a university.

"Where do you see yourself in five years from now?" I asked. Her reply: "Any job I can get."

Mary explained that what motivated her to stay in school was that she didn't want to be like her brother and die without a high school diploma. She added that it would be easier to get a job and concluded, "Also, I owe it to myself." She continued: "My brother didn't accomplish anything but bad companions and drugs. . . . I want to die knowing that I accomplished that I went through school, that I did what I had to do, that I accomplished my dream, what I want to try and do. I don't want to die thinking I did nothing with my life." In fact, when Mary was in school, she was generally engaged in learning, adding extra effort. For example, when she realized she was going to miss a group presentation because she was required to take her grandmother to the doctor, she gave her speech to another student and helped organize the group to continue without her.

In response to an assignment to write about the importance of knowing your history, an assignment given during black history month, and in response to a provocative assembly led by a black minister, Mary wrote:

I think that it is very important to know your own history because without your own history you wont know who your people are, what they stood for, and what they do even though you live somewhere else other than your own country you still have morals from your country that you keep. I'm sure that you have adapted to this way of life but when you look deep down into yourself you'll find some morals and value that you have picked up from your parents and you should stand and believe in it.

Example:

I believe that your virginity is very important, but just because everybody else is not a virgin anymore, doesn't mean that my belief is stupid. But I still stick to it.

In this essay Mary proclaims her identity and the importance of sticking to one's beliefs. She grounds her own identity and participation in school in her own understanding of the cultural beliefs that she has learned from her family. At the same time that she asserts her identity as a Filipino, she acknowledges her Americanness. In another interview, Mary told me, "I consider myself black. I was born and raised in [California], and I've adapted to this life. When I went to the Philippines, they called me black." As a senior in high school Mary carried many shifting identities: she alternated between wearing the mantle of "student" and participating in class; and missing schooling, tagging, and tuning out. She indicated that although there was a marginal reward for

staying in school given her life circumstances, she was convinced of its merit.

Lianne: "But after I Started Writing, I Was Like, Yeah, I'm Going To Graduate and Go on to College and Try To Find Me a Job"

Lianne, an African American young mother, sat in the back corner of the classroom, her desk slightly apart from the rest of the group, for the entire year in her senior social studies class. While her attendance was sporadic due to the poor health of her one-year-old son, when she was able to attend class she seemed engaged in the discussions and activities. She played the role of observer, watching closely and commenting infrequently while her classmates talked among themselves. When a class discussion heated up or touched upon an issue about which she had strong feelings, however, Lianne voiced her opinions loudly and clearly, sticking to what she believed and articulating her position.

Lianne explained to me that after she became pregnant she made the decision to keep to herself and stay away from her peers. Whereas prior to the birth of her son it had been easy for her to be distracted by her classmates—in her words, "It was real easy for somebody to discourage me from doing something good that I wanted to do"—when she became pregnant she began to observe rather than participate in her friends' activities. Lianne used this position to observe her friends' mistakes and commented, "You know, they could be doing something better if they wasn't surrounded by a whole bunch of people or letting somebody talk for you or, you know, it's just peer pressure, it's . . . letting somebody else tell you what you want to do, instead of what you really want to do." At about the same time Lianne determined that she wanted to be a nurse. She explained that the experience of her pregnancy caused her to figure out what she had to do in order to raise her son.

The summer after her son was born, a substitute teacher suggested to Lianne's summer school class that the students keep a daily journal in which they wrote what they wanted to do with their lives and the steps they would take to achieve that goal. He suggested that they refer to the journal, and their writing, any time they had doubts about themselves. Lianne took his suggestion seriously. She was convinced by her teacher's own success—he had a nice car and showed them his pay stub—success he attributed to his own journal.

At first, Lianne explained, she "just" wrote down these words in her spiral notebook, "I want to be a nurse." Occasionally she wrote about her dream, which was to become a dancer. After a while she began to write down the steps: "First I have to finish high school, then go to college and take nursing courses." Some days she would write down why she thought she would make a good nurse. Lianne attributed her decision to find out more about various nursing programs to her writing; as she researched this profession, she wrote the details in her journal. She wrote in her notebook every one or two days, placing it where it was

always visible. If she became discouraged during the school day, she would remember what she had written that morning or she would return to the written words themselves.

I asked Lianne to explain to me how it was that her journal worked. She replied:

It worked because it made me think more about it. Before, I would just be like, yeah, I'm going to be a nurse and I'm just going to graduate, go on to college, and work towards this nursing thing. But after I started writing, I was like, yeah, I'm going to graduate and go on to college and try to find me a little job, and just finding out everything that I had to do, and how long it took, and how many years of requirements and how many years of nursing school and like when I finally got to nursing school, what was the first thing I was going to have to learn, and you know, all kind of stuff, I went and got CPR certified, and all of that. It just made me start thinking more about it.

Lianne said that her writing kept her focused on what she wanted for her future. She described her journal writing in terms that were different from the writing she did in school.

My writing in school is the writing that people expect of me to do. And my writing in my diary and everything is just writing down what I feel and not number one, number two. It's just more homey writing. Being at home writing, what I feel writing, what happened today, that kind of writing. But I don't write that way at school. It's usually, write a paragraph about this. You know at school, they usually want you to write something down that you're not interested in.

While Lianne had the impression that her home writing was quite different from the writing she was assigned in school, there were areas of convergence. Students were frequently asked in their American government class to write logs that reflected their opinions. Essays connecting personal experiences to literature were commonly assigned in an English class. The culminating project of their high school education was a senior project designed to give students research experience in their communities on a topic that reflected their interests. When she chose to write a senior project on nursing, Lianne conducted new research. Rather than looking back to her journals and reflecting on what she had already learned, Lianne treated this assignment as a new one, interviewed nurses, and gathered new brochures and materials. It simply didn't occur to her that she had already filled three notebooks with experiences and information that would be useful for this school assignment. In her mind, the writing she chose to do in her journals at home was unconnected to her assigned writing for school, despite the teachers' attempts to create continuities. On the other hand, when engaged in a dialogue about her journal, Lianne connected her journal writing directly to her ability to stay focused on her future; her ability to both envision a career and to plan the steps to reach that goal. Lianne was

encouraged by teachers to write about work, careers, and an imagined workplace. This approach contrasts sharply with the more common method, which emphasizes the direct teaching of workplace competencies or skills. (For an elaborated discussion, see Grubb 1995.)

Jo: "[You Should] Become a Big Black Successful Black Woman!"

Jo tended to be goal-directed and upbeat. As an African American senior she divided her life into neat, compact compartments: a best friend at school from whom she was inseparable and a long-time boyfriend at home; a job where she earned money to buy clothes; and school, where she quickly completed her work so that it didn't interfere with her plans at home.

At the end of the school year Jo wrote the following message in her friend Heather's yearbook. It was a variation of the message that she wrote in the book of nearly every African American female and reflects the talk I heard frequently between the black female students.

To Heather,
We Finally made It out of [high school]. Don't Let Daniel Put Any Kids on you. Always keep your head up and Don't let anyone Bring you Down. Stay In School. Become a Big Black successful Black woman!
Much Love,
Jo

While Jo often complained, in response to assigned writing in her English or social studies classes, that she didn't have any ideas or opinions, she always had a saying for a friend's yearbook or words and phrases that acted as decoration for her own notebooks and folders.

When I asked about her career goals at the beginning of the year, Jo replied that she was going to be either a lawyer or a cosmetologist. She laughed as she explained that everyone always told her she should be a lawyer because she argued so well. On days she stayed home from school, Jo said that she watched and enjoyed Court T.V. Later in the year she modified these plans, explaining that initially she would become a cosmetologist and later a lawyer. She elaborated further that her decision to become a hairdresser was her backup plan, something she could fall back on if her career as a lawyer did not materialize.

Jo's eye was on the future. Days before she graduated from high school, she had enrolled in a beauty college—a ten-month program to become a licensed cosmetologist. Although her mother encouraged her to go to a four-year college and live in a dormitory, her choice to study cosmetology had a certain appeal because it provided her with a clear path to a job. From the start, Jo was determined to obtain a chair in the salon where she had always gone to get her own hair styled. Her main interest in this field was that it would provide her with a stable and guaranteed income. It was also familiar and understandable to her. She has a brother who is a barber and aunts who were once hair stylists. As

a child she loved to experiment with her dolls and styled her friends' and even her own hair. And while she entertained dreams of buying and managing her own shop so that she wouldn't have to work for someone else, using her job as a cosmetologist to pay her way through college, or as a backup plan in case she doesn't like to practice law, Jo listed these options at the same time she talked about having a child the next year. Her mind was focused on the immediate, not the distant, future.

While her high school did not outwardly support this career choice—for instance, there was a job shadowing program for the many students who were interested in nursing and health-related professions but no mention of cosmetology—Jo used the required assignments and her senior project to learn more about and explain to others her chosen career. Because the cosmetology plan was the goal she most often voiced to her teachers, it became the future they assumed for her. Thus when Jo refused to read even the first page of the assigned book in her English class, her exasperated teacher told me, “She won't need to read Shakespeare to become a cosmetologist,” overlooking Jo's goal to pursue law.

For her final presentation of her senior project, Jo wrote the following short speech about cosmetology:

My name is Jo Hall and I decided to do my presentation on cosmetology. Every sence I was a little girl, I've always liked doing hair. There are many reasons why I like doing hair: it's fun, it's an easy way to make good money fast, I can become my own boss and people can start working for me. I know for a fact that by me doing hair and having my own shop I will be working for myself, I would'nt have to work for anyone. Doing hair will be something I enjoy doing.

That year the teachers decided to require students to complete senior projects in order to graduate. Teachers encouraged the seniors to use the project as an opportunity to explore a subject that captured their interest. Many students, like Jo and Lianne, used the assignment to reflect on their future careers, tying together the home and school lives, their present and their future. While her school did not explicitly prepare Jo for a future in cosmetology—she was not taught the particular skills she would need to succeed in that field—she used the school assignments to imagine her future.

Discussion: “It's Cool Now to Do Well”

This article offers case studies of four urban female students based on their talk and writing both in and out of school. Each of these narratives raises questions about the relationship between the literacy practices students learn in school and those they need for the workplace. All suggest the importance of teaching youth more than “functional literacy”—the literacies needed to function in the workplace (see Hull 1993b; Lankshear and Lawler 1987; Levine 1982; Schultz, in press). Instead, they argue for the critical need to teach literacy practices that will help youth

to move past their present situations into the future. In addition, each of these narratives is gendered; these are stories about females trying to negotiate the school to work transition. The young women describe their futures in terms of pregnancy and motherhood, and careers such as cosmetology and nursing. They rarely mention men in the future; they assume they will be responsible to provide for themselves. In a discussion about the influence of my race, as a white Jewish female, on the research, one young woman asked me whether I had talked with "white girls" about these same issues. (I hadn't.) She wondered about their concerns and explained that black females think only about money, that it's their primary and motivating concern. This theme of money was threaded through each of the narratives I collected from the females of color.⁵

Another theme that emerged from the narratives was the importance of schooling in the lives of each of these young women. In a series of articles Signithia Fordham (1988, 1991, 1993) described and offered an explanation for a disturbing phenomenon. From her multiyear ethnographic study beginning with 11th graders in a predominantly black urban high school in Washington, D.C., and an examination of autobiographical statements of successful black professionals, she posited that, in order to achieve academically, African American students felt they had to sever their ties with their home community, particularly their race. They spoke of the need to "act white" or "raceless" in order to be successful in school. I was interested to find if this same reasoning held true nearly ten years later in a West Coast urban high school in which the student body is completely "minority," according to the students themselves.

In my interviews with seniors I heard the same story again and again. Students described their 11th-grade year as a time when, like Tanya, whose story opens this article, they nearly dropped out of school. They explained that during this year they rarely attended school and barely passed their courses. But when they began their senior year, perhaps because graduation was closer and they wanted to "walk the stage" with their classmates, perhaps because they each knew countless people unable to find work without a high school or college diploma, perhaps because they suddenly realized that college was a possibility, and for a variety of other complex reasons, these students began to work harder and strive for good grades. I asked students whether they were worried about being called names, were told they were "acting white," or were disrespected for doing well and achieving good grades. They laughed and, like Tanya, said they had heard that was true a few years ago—that you could be called a "nerd" for doing well—but that was no longer the case. "It's cool now to do well," I was informed.

An African American student described to me, in graphic terms, her own change in attitude from 11th to 12th grade:

- KS: What were your peers saying to you in 11th grade that kept you from doing well?
- Danyell: I was peer pressured to doing drugs 'cause, umm, I was like smoking a lot of marijuana and I started not doing my work. I started lagging and stuff, coming to school all late, don't come to school, ditching school. Just going other places other than school. Then my mom found out. She started talking to me. And she's like, it's your decision, you'd better do what you want to do or you know you're not going to make it. You're going to end up six feet deep, and that's what she, that little word right there, you know, changed me. [*In a quieter voice*] Not to being killed or anything. Because she say, I hear it's kind of rough and without a diploma, you can't make it.
- KS: So that's all she had to say to you?
- Danyell: Yeah.

In her senior year Danyell was a successful student who was admitted to a top historically black college in the South. This interview, and others, suggests that the harsh realities of the 1990s may have changed students' attitudes to school and toward the future. Not only were many of the students with whom I spoke willing to "act white" and work in school, they seemed determined to continue their education to ensure their future success. One student explained that while students were accused of "perpetrating" when they acted "fake," meaning they were quiet at school or work and loud on the street, achieving in school did not count as "perpetrating"—acting like someone else—because you were "stupid" if you didn't try in school. Like Lianne, they seemed to feel that these were "different times," times when jobs were scarce and violence prevalent.⁶

From School to Work, from Work to School

Currently, each of the females profiled in this article continues to struggle with her plans and visions for the future. While in school, Denise wrote about the present conditions of her life. Her writing contained the emotions she was reluctant to express outwardly in school. Her writing seemed to help her make it through each school day, rather than providing her with a chance to focus on the future. Denise's future plans are still unclear. During her first year after high school she tried each of these options in quick succession: she attended community college, worked in a variety of low-paying jobs, and joined the armed forces. She was not satisfied with any of these choices, and in the fall of her second year out of high school she returned to the community college. A talented writer, she seemed only able to use her composing to reflect and speak out about her present, rather than as a way to imagine or plan for her future.

Mary used school assignments to describe acts—writing graffiti—that were clearly antithetical to school. She used school literacy tasks to both

participate and resist, to explore and test her own beliefs. After she was unsuccessful in her search for a job during the summer and fall after graduation, Mary took the path of least resistance and enrolled in a community college. A friend convinced her to accompany him as he registered for courses and then proceeded to persuade Mary to enroll in the same courses he was taking, courses that will enable her to transfer to a four-year university. Although she had assumed that her school days were over, when she was unable to find a job because she had no work experience on her resume, Mary fell into school as an alternative. She told me, "I never thought I would be the one to go to college." While the literacies she learned in school haven't helped her to find a job, they did enable her to return to school. While she claims that her current career plans are to add enough to her résumé so that she is able to get her first job, she is busy completing courses that will allow her to continue her education.

Lianne's writing helped her stay in school and formulate a plan for the future. She wrote about work to convince herself of the value of remaining in school. After she dropped out of a community college in the fall, Lianne returned to a different community college, one close to home, to continue to take courses in nursing. She struggles to make ends meet financially, to find care for her son, to pursue her interests in dance, and to stay convinced that it is worth it to stay in school long enough to obtain a nursing degree. She is often tempted to drop out and enroll in a short-term program, but so far she has remained in a four-year nursing program. Her writing seemed to help her to stay focused on school, graduate from high school, and continue with her education.

As a high school student, Jo used most of her school assignments to learn about her intended career, which she began even before the school year ended. She is currently working a few days a week as a cosmetologist in a small shop. While her job is mainly to help out and learn from the shop's owner, she is beginning to build her own client base. Although as a cosmetology student Jo seemed to understand the specific literacy requirements for her initial goal—to work in a beauty salon—she rarely thought about the larger picture and the literacies she might need to run her own business or continue with her education.

These students live in an impoverished area during a difficult historical period, which may account, in part, for the differences in their responses to those found by Fordham (1988, 1991, 1993). Many know more people in jail than adults or peers with good-paying, stable jobs. The alternatives seemed clear to many youth, and they were determined not to make the same mistakes as their sisters and brothers. Contrary to the messages frequently conveyed by the media and politicians, as their stories reveal, these youth are not lost. As they made the transition from school to work, their writing bridged the worlds of home and community, school and work, the past, the present, and their futures. Through writing, these urban females had the opportunity to envision a future

and chart their course toward it. The female students who remained in high school in their senior year were the survivors. Through a variety of personal and external resources, and perhaps because of the opportunities they were given to write and speak about their futures, they had managed to persist in their education. It will be critical for researchers and people who care about urban youth to continue these conversations, and to learn the dimensions of the phenomenon I discovered: that female youth of color in their senior years were committed to success in school, even if it meant “acting white,” because to do otherwise was more than “stupid”; it was suicidal.

Concluding Thoughts: Reconceptualizing Literacies of Schooling, Literacies of Work

We naturally name [a person’s] vocation from that one of the callings which distinguishes him, rather than from those which he has in common with all others. But we should not allow ourselves to be so subject to words as to ignore and virtually deny his other callings when it comes to a consideration of the vocational phases of education. [Dewey 1916:359]

The role of vocational education or education for work in the standard curriculum has been debated since the movement to add a vocational component to formal schooling at the turn of the 20th century (Grubb, in press). In the statement above Dewey reminds us of the importance of education to broaden rather than narrow the opportunities open to students. The question remains: How can (and should) schools prepare students for work and/or careers? When asked about their perceptions of school literacy, the students in this study invariably replied that it included the literacy practices necessary to graduate from high school. They rarely saw connections between school learning and the requirements to obtain a job. Some had learned how to word-process, write a résumé, and act during an interview, although many learned these skills in after-school programs. Most of the students I interviewed claimed that they didn’t need reading and writing for their job. Clarissa, a Mexican American courtesy clerk at a local grocery store, explained that she had learned to communicate, to speak English, in school; that was the most important skill she needed for her job. To get her job at the grocery store, she needed to interview well and pass a multiple choice test called “the happy test,” which tested for compliance, an outgoing disposition, and an inclination to be upbeat and polite. She had learned that in order to be promoted to a checker—a more desirable, higher-paying position—the major requirements were that she work the assigned hours and “always be available,” and that she talk to the current checkers to let them know of her interest in moving up. She had a difficult time connecting the literacy practices she had learned in school to those required for her work.

I am left with the question: What are the literacies of work that Denise, Mary, Lianne, Jo, and their classmates need to learn? Narrow definitions of literacies of work are usually translated by schools as discrete skills that are necessary to accomplish particular jobs. In high school courses such as applied communications—a course that has been gaining popularity as schools are mandated to prepare students for the workplace—the imagined workplace is used as the context to teach various kinds of reading and writing (see Grubb 1995). Thus, for example, students are taught to write office memos and business letters rather than personal responses to literature (Grubb, *in press*; Jury, *in press*). In fact, the literature that accompanies these programs goes so far as to state that personal narrative writing is rarely used in the job environment (Jury, *in press*). The data from this study of the writing and lives of young women of color in transition from high school to the workplace suggest a very different conclusion. For these students, a range of genres of writing, including the composition of personal narratives, helped them imagine the future and construct plans to reach their goals.

For Jo, the cosmetologist, there are limited and limiting “literacy skills”—what some would term “functional literacy”—that she must master to obtain her license (see Lankshear and Lawler 1987; Levine 1982). She needs to know how to read, understand and fill out time cards and record sheets. She is required to read and understand product labels. After learning the correct answers for the state board, she was required to remember them for the six hours of the test. As a practicing stylist she will need to use a host of skills such as keeping up with the latest styles and products, and how to win and keep customers. But I would suggest that this description of literacy garnered from interviews with Jo and her teachers and peers in the cosmetology program is limited; if this is all Jo learns, she will be consigned to employment at the margins. To move beyond her current circumstances, Jo must learn to imagine and plan for her future, whether it is to work in or own a shop, to continue her education to develop a specialty like hair coloring, or to use cosmetology as a way to earn money while she pursues another career. One of her cosmetology school classmates put it this way: “You know how warehouse work is considered a job? Well cosmetology is usually considered a job, too. It can be a career if you learn how to do everything.”

If schools prepare Jo to succeed in the narrow sense—to do only her current job—she will be cheated. If they prepare her to think past her present circumstances in terms of a career—which implies movement and possibilities—she will have obtained an education that prepares her to grapple with her future.⁷ As Freire (1972) insists, the acquisition of literacy involves both action and reflection. This constitutes a new view of literacy for work, one that challenges current conceptions and suggests that in order to succeed students must learn to think past their present circumstances or current positions into the future. In her critical discussion of the prevailing myths about workplace (il)literacy, Hull

(1993b) suggests we listen to different voices—the perspectives of workers themselves—for new understandings of the literacies needed for work. The students/workers of this study provide some initial data from which to construct this vision. Playwright Anna Deavere Smith introduced the concept of “identity in motion” in the introduction to her book *Fires in the Mirror* (1993), which is about the conflict between Jews and blacks in Crown Heights, New York. I would suggest that schools might productively use this notion to reconceptualize the literacies of schooling and work by asking the question: What are the literacies that might encourage students to develop and articulate identities in motion, identities that will allow them to continue to pursue opportunities and envision of future for themselves?

I will conclude with the words of LaReesha, an African American student with cerebral palsy who has been mainstreamed throughout her schooling and is now taking computer courses at a community college. In this essay she frames her future in terms of dreams.

From my personal observation I've had many dreams. The dreams I've had were destroy because of my disability. I had dreams of maybe to be a dancer or a singer but those dreams have passed me. Now as I get older, I now see what I want is to be a fashion designer. I'm going to make my dreams come true and I'm going to succeed at it.

When society looks at you trying to achieve your goals or dreams they always try to bring you down especially if you're black because part of society think that black don't belong in this world. Then when you try to go for your dreams society brings you down and try to make you stay down. If you go for what you [want] you will get it. Never let society bring you down. If you go for what you [want] you will get it. Never let society bring you down, if you do you'll never get any where. Never give up on your dreams go for what you want don't let anyone get in the way. . . .

LaReesha has not given up on her own dream of continuing her education after high school. She is currently attending a community college where, although she was dissuaded by her counselor from pursuing fashion design courses because she was told they were too difficult, she is pursuing a career in computers. Despite her race, gender, and disability, LaReesha continues to dream and plan for her future. I see our challenge as educators as that of providing knowledge, support, and opportunities for students to write about their present and their futures. And at the same time that we help them keep their dreams alive, we need to work to ensure that economic opportunities exist for them to pursue.

Notes

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1. Student texts have not been edited; any misspellings or errors were in the original texts.

2. The Equal Opportunities Program supplies financial assistance to students from impoverished families who are the first in their family to attend college.

3. In her recent study of white working-class males and females, Weis (1990) found a similar situation.

4. Statistics compiled in May 1994 for the 1993–94 school year indicate the following ethnic distribution in the school: African American 40.0%, Asian 12.0%, European American 0.8%, Filipino 1.8%, Latino 6.6%, Mexican American 36.5%, Native American 0.1%, Pacific Islander 1.3%, and unknown 0.9%. Note that there are no categories for mixed-race students.

5. In response to the question about how my race affected this research, she replied that she was just as honest with me as she would be with someone from her own race. She allowed that sometimes she explained things in more detail to make sure that I understood but that she didn't hold back and was in fact glad that a white person was writing about success rather than perpetuating stereotypes of failures. She concluded, "I love it. That you can write, so I can show people how ignorant they are."

6. A larger context in which to place this study is a recent report released by the organization Children Now and described in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 22, 1995. The report states that in California in 1993, the first year of this study, teen unemployment was the highest in the nation (26 percent); the youth homicide rate was highest in this state, 59 percent higher than the U.S. average; and nearly one in three children were living in poverty.

7. Thanks to Beth Goldstein for insight into the distinctions between work and careers and to Katie Anderson-Levitt, *AEQ's* editor, for pushing the ideas of this article a notch further.

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