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*Underground Undergrads: UCLA Undocumented Immigrant Students
Speak Out* (review)

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on teaching, including the use of business quality control notions about production, training, and profits. This chapter also outlines the goal for this text: "To illuminate the neglected role of teacher trade unions [and] to analyze their potential power to win an alternative type of education" (to read this first chapter for free go to www.newpol.org).

Chapters in Part II present the troubling experiences of individuals in countries across the globe. Most disturbing is the story from Namibia by John Nyambe, which analyzes what happened when the World Bank sought to cut public expenditure on education and increase class size to 40-50 students or more. These cuts challenge Namibia's efforts to promote learner-centered pedagogy. Stories from Mexico, Denmark, and the West Indies are equally disturbing and present different ways in which public education is under attack. A more heartening story comes from Alvaro Moreira Hypolito in Brazil in his chapter "Educational Restructuring, Democratic Education, and Teachers." Here we learn how a dedicated group of parents and community leaders brought about effective, meaningful changes by taking up their authority and creating a coalition of leftist parties. By joining forces, workers, parents, and community leaders used their influence to ensure that the Escola Plural Program meets the needs and ideals of the local population.

Additional accounts of teacher and community resistance to the global assault on teaching come from Chicago, St. Lucia, Australia, South Africa, Germany, and Israel. These accounts illustrate ways in which the neoliberal and social conservative assaults are framed but also resisted by local community actions. Rob Durbridge's essay, "Challenging Neoliberalism:

Education Unions in Australia" describes how teacher unions work in solidarity with other unions to fight for views that are supported by the general public, even though these views may go beyond the boundaries of union interests per se. One example was the success the unions had in protesting Iraq's 1991 occupation of Kuwait and the 2003 war in Iraq.

By anatomizing the insidious education goals of the neoliberals and giving voice to global stories of resistance against the assault on teaching, Compton and Weiner's collection helps the reader identify and contextualize events in the United States that may otherwise remain camouflaged and muffled in silence. It is this power, hearing from those outside of the United States, that makes this text a "must read" for teachers, teacher educators, future teachers, parents, and anyone concerned about social justice and education for "the public good." For continued updates on teacher struggles around the world visit Compton's website at www.teachersolidarity.com.

***Underground Undergrads:
UCLA Undocumented Immigrant
Students Speak Out***

**Edited by Gabriela Madera, et.al.
(Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Labor
Research and Education. 2008)**

Reviewed by Marissa López

In March 2006 I had just accepted a job as an Assistant Professor of English at UCLA as a specialist in Chicano Literature. From my home in Pennsylvania I watched the televised protests against Representative James Sensenbrenner's (R-WI) draconian immi-

gration bill (HR 4437) as hundreds of thousands of protestors took to the streets around the country. I could not wait to get to Los Angeles to teach and learn with the future leaders of the revolution. It was a romantic picture. The reality is equally inspiring, if slightly more complicated. My first quarter teaching at UCLA, a brilliant and passionate student named Mario Escobar took my seminar on Chicana/o literature and globalization. He came to my office hours one day to talk about Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, which we were reading for class. He was moved by her description of the border as "*una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" (Anzaldúa 3). It reminded him, he said, of the dead, dismembered bodies he saw stacked along the Honduran border while serving as a child soldier during El Salvador's civil war. I stared at him in silence, thinking, "Wow, I am really out of my depth—what can I possibly teach this person about *la frontera*?"

Mario, who took a rubber bullet during the Los Angeles protests, was just recently granted asylum in the United States and is featured, along with seven other UCLA students, in the new book *Underground Undergrads: UCLA Undocumented Students Speak Out*. The book is published by UCLA's Center for Labor Research and Education and grew out of a class the center offers called "Immigrant Rights, Labor, and Higher Education." The documented and undocumented students in the class conducted interviews, researched legal history and community resources, and collected visual and verbal art for the book. It is a powerful and moving testament to the lived experience of immigration today and reflects the growing

student movement around immigration and educational access.

Underground Undergrads is organized in three parts: Legislation, Speaking Out, and Taking Action. The first covers the history of immigration legislation since 1980 with a particular focus on the California and Federal DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Acts, which, at the Federal level, provides a path to legalization for undocumented students. The second section offers in-depth, personal views on how eight undocumented students made their paths to UCLA and how they grapple with the dearth of options available to them upon graduation. The third section describes IDEAS (Improving Dreams, Equality, Access and Success), a student support group for undocumented students at UCLA, and includes a number of other resources for readers looking to learn more and get involved in the immigrants' rights struggle.

Besides serving as a resource for political action, this book is a useful research and teaching tool. Though one wishes for more depth in the legislation section—a broader historical overview and a more consistent effort at placing California legislation in a Federal context, for example—the section does offer a comprehensive schematic history and allows us as readers to find our bearings in a complex field, a real benefit to undergraduates in a variety of disciplines. *Underground Undergrads'* real strength, though, lies in the personal narratives which are both powerful and compelling. These can be used as stand-alone texts to illuminate historical or sociological analyses, as a complement to fictional narratives of immigration or political conflicts abroad, or in courses on oral histories and memoir (some are first

person narratives and some are told to a third party).

But *Underground Undergrads'* appeal transcends its use value. Everybody should read this book: students, educators, legislators, commentators. Anyone who has ever called the undocumented lazy or criminal, or felt that the immigrant's struggle was irrelevant to their own, will be hard-pressed to defend those claims against these testimonies of hope and perseverance.

Underground Undergrads: UCLA Undocumented Immigrant Students Speak Out is in *paperback* for \$10 and available only from CLRE at <http://www.labor.ucla.edu/publications/books/underground.html>.

Works Cited

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

Teaching Notes

Raising Victor Vargas in an Urban High School Classroom

By Philip Cartelli

The criticisms that have been leveled at the 2002 film *Raising Victor Vargas* are mainly fair, that is to say logical, when they note that the subject matter of working-class Dominican families in New York City's Lower East Side is expertly manipulated by the director, Peter Solett, a white middle-class NYU graduate. The

critics also generally agree that the film is quite good and I believe it is a relevant teaching tool in different settings.

I used *Raising Victor Vargas* as part of my curriculum at an after school enrichment program at a family-oriented homeless shelter in the South Bronx last fall. The film has also been used to great success by a colleague of mine at a Manhattan public high school.

What initially caught the attention of my high school students—and kept them from talking or text-messaging throughout the film's 90-minute duration—was the language and appearance of the people on screen: Latino/a men and women in an urban setting (the common New York location meant little to many of them, who had rarely left their borough) talking and acting like them. Since these teenagers had rarely viewed dramatized versions of their lives that bore any resemblance to both harsh *and* pleasant realities, I would argue that *Victor Vargas* provided from the opening a recognizable context within which they felt comfortable discussing and criticizing its content.

Over the period of no more than a week, the film's protagonist Victor, along with his surprisingly poetic sidekick Harold, tramps around the Lower East Side from local swimming pools to public housing yards to the tenement he shares with his younger siblings and domineering yet sentimental grandmother, all of whom represented real-life family members and acquaintances for my students, the majority of whom had immigrant parents. The central narrative focuses on Victor's involvement with another teenager, Julie, who initially enters into a relationship with Victor to defend herself from frequent and unwanted advances from other—older—neighborhood men. When Victor