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I'm bien pocha: Transnational teachers of English in Mexico

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Dedication

Para mi 'apá, que descanse en paz.

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I'm bien pocha: Transnational teachers of English in Mexico

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Mexican officials of the Secretaría de Educación Pública of Nuevo León assert that approximately 95 percent of English teachers working in public schools outside of the Monterrey metropolitan area learned their English as children of Mexican immigrants to the U.S. While much has been written on the effects of Mexican immigration in the U.S., little exists regarding the ways in which transnationals, who have returned to Mexico, have adapted to and/or transformed Mexican society and the education system. The purpose of this dissertation is to describe the phenomenon of transnationalism as it presented itself and continues to unfold in the lives of five transnational individuals currently employed as English teachers in rural Nuevo Leon.

This dissertation is a qualitative, descriptive, multiple case study that utilizes ethnographic methods. The primary data consists of in-depth interviews, participant observations in homes and classrooms, and analysis of written artifacts

such as school records of the five transnational participants. Although the focus is on these five participants, the voices of their parents, siblings, and Mexican education officials are interwoven.

Analysis indicates that these individuals have painful memories of their transitions between U.S. and Mexican schooling contexts due to acculturation/assimilation processes. They provide insight into issues of race as they manifest themselves in the U.S. educational system, and issues of class as they play out in the educational system of Mexico. As adults, these transnational teachers have been extremely successful at trading the cultural capital they acquired in the U.S. for their own gain in Mexico. At the same time, they maintain the values of their immigrant parents nurtured by the transnational experience which have also served them well. As a whole, these transnational individuals have developed a borderlands consciousness which they seek to pass on to their own students and children. This study fills a gap in the research literature on transnationalism by exploring the phenomenon from the Mexican side of the border. This study highlights the shifting multiple frames of reference of transnationals and thus includes implications for theory and research as well as for educators working with Mexican origin youth in the U.S.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Lidia: I guess I am not just from here or there, I'm both from here and there. That doesn't sound too good, but it is. It really is. I like being in both places. And I think it is good to be from both places. Like I see the world or life bigger than just Americans or just Mexicans see it. And really, I can live here or I can live there. It doesn't really matter that much. But I can't live there without coming here *de vez en cuando* {sometimes} and I can't live here without going there sometimes. *Así es la onda. Y de veras, toda mi familia es así.* {That's the way it is. And really, my whole family is that way.}

In June of 2001, I gave a presentation on second language teaching methodology in Monterrey, Mexico at a summer teacher training session sponsored by the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* {SEP - Secretary of Public Education} of the Mexican state of Nuevo Leon. English teachers involved in the SEP's *Programa de Inglés en Primaria* {English in Primary School Program} had come from all over state to participate in the week long training. At the end of my presentation, a young teacher named Claudia said to me, "That was pretty good. I'm not sure if it'll fly in San Isidro, but I'll give it a try." I was immediately taken back for a second, not by the content of what Claudia said, but how she said it. There was no mistaking the strong Midwest vowels sounds, not to mention the idiomatic expressions. Although my own Midwest accent has softened over the years from living in numerous other places, I know that accent well because I hear it every time I talk to my sisters. Always the skilled orator, I said, "Huh? Wait a minute. Where are you from?" Claudia started laughing, "Freaked you out, didn't I?" she said, "I went to school in Illinois for awhile when I was little."

In hindsight, I am embarrassed to admit that even I was momentarily blinded by the American immigrant mythology I had dutifully absorbed as a young student in school. “Give us your tired, your poor. . . .” Land of Opportunity, and so on. Suárez-Orozco (1998) refers to this indoctrination as pro-immigration theatre:

Pro-immigration scripts are mythmaking. They are about (re)creating a sacred language to inscribe the eternal ideals and values that constitute our cultural soul. In these scripts, the new arrivals are cast in terms that are simply irresistible to many audiences. Enter, stage left: humble hard working folk, killing themselves to become proud and loyal Americans. (p. 289-290)

Fortunately, my lapse into myth was short-lived. The reality of my own experience as a high school teacher in the Southwest U.S. contradicted this myth. I knew that many of my students of Mexican origin returned to Mexico. These students were not actors, but real individuals with real life stories. Francisco was not doing well in school and had a minor run-in with the police. His parents decided to send him back to Sinaloa to live with his grandparents for, as he called it, “an attitude adjustment.” Esme’s whole family was going back, having earned enough money to start their own business in Michoacan. Martita had been living with her aunt for three years in order to learn English. When she felt she had learned enough, she went back to Guanajuato. Rocío’s family had an established pattern of circular migration; six months in the U.S., six months in Mexico. I should not have been surprised at finding running into someone like Claudia while in Monterrey. I have come into contact with lots of individuals like Claudia over the years, but always in the U.S.

Contrary to popular mythology in the U.S., the migratory flow of people across the U.S.-Mexico border is and has always been bi-directional. Unfortunately, I have yet to discover any statistics as to their official numbers, but as a high school teacher, I knew that at least 10 to 15 percent of my Mexican origin students went to live in Mexico. This figure does not include those who disappeared from my classroom, having been forcibly deported as “illegal aliens”. Instead, it represented those Mexican origin students and/or their families who made the choice to live in Mexico, rather than the U.S. While the newspapers frequently refer to great numbers of immigrants, particularly from Mexico, who enter the U.S. every year, I have yet to read an account which makes reference to those who leave. It is not part of our national mythology. Yet as Wyman (1993) has documented, immigrant families returning to live in their cultural homelands has been a part of our national history.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

I use the term *Mexican origin* as a comprehensive term to refer to those who trace their ancestry to Mexico. It is not a particularly precise term in that it refers to group which encompasses a great deal of diversity ranging from those who have been born in the U.S. back one or more generations to recent immigrants. The terms *Mexican* and *Mexican American* which are frequently used for classification purposes in the U.S. tend to be based on place of birth and/or legal status. However, such legal classifications break down when examining my participants. For example, two of the parents of my participants

were born in the U.S., but did not actually live there until they were adults. In contrast, some of their own children were born in Mexico, but spent much of their childhood in the U.S. Therefore, as a matter of shorthand I may use the term Mexican origin and provide explanations regarding legal classifications when relevant.

Like the term Mexican origin, the term *immigrant* is a broad one which generally refers to those individuals who move from the country to another country. Traditionally in the U.S., immigration was seen as a one way ticket. Immigrants leave the home country behind and settle permanently in the U.S. Over the course of one or more generations, immigrants and their children abandon cultural practices rooted in the home country and increasingly adopt those of the American mainstream. Although this is commonly perceived to represent the history of immigrants to the U.S., the reality has been more complex. As Wyman (1993) has documented, the phenomenon of immigrant families maintaining strong ties to their cultural homelands has always been a part of our national history. Nowhere is the complexity of the term immigrant more apparent than with respect to Mexican immigrants. Given the proximity of Mexico to the U.S., the homeland is really not that far away.

The term immigrant becomes problematic in that appears to be idealized or static and does not take into consideration the subjectivities of the immigrants themselves, nor does it encompass the life span of the immigrants. Many Mexican immigrants may immigrate to the U.S. with the intention of returning to Mexico, but in the end do not do so. Some immigrate to the U.S. with no

intention of returning to Mexico. Others may spend most of their lives in the U.S. and later return to Mexico upon retirement. Still others may spend several years in the U.S., several years in Mexico, and so on. Once again within the families of my participants, one sibling may have no intention of returning to live in Mexico while for another the return is part of the life plan.

Circular migrants engage in a consistent pattern of revolving migration during a year along the lines of six months in Mexico and six months in the U.S. This pattern generally involves those Mexican origin families who are engaged in agricultural labor in the U.S. According to Dolson and Villaseñor (1996) approximately 45,000 children are served by the Binational Program developed to promote educational continuity between the U.S. and Mexico (p. 126). The Secretaría de Educación Pública of Nuevo León has a special program to deal with such children who complete half of the school year in Mexico and half in the U.S. None of my participants engaged in circular migration although they may have siblings and/or parents who do so or did so in the past. However, within my participants' families both the past and the present, the children were not part of the circular migration.

Sojourner migrants/immigrants generally work for years at a time in the U.S., but maintain a permanent residence in Mexico. They tend to come to the U.S. for a specific purpose like amassing the capital needed to start a business and have little vested interest in adapting to the host country. This type of immigrant/migrant is most closely associated with young Mexican males who may or may not immigrate to the U.S. with their children or spouses. Some of my

participants' parents were sojourners who later developed a permanent residence on both sides of the border. Four of the five sets of parents own homes in the U.S. in addition to the homes they own in Mexico.

Migrant generally refers to a person who moves within the boundaries of a single nation in order to work. Within the context of the U.S., the term migrant is associated with those agricultural workers who move around the U.S. at various times of the year in order to follow the crops. However, it has also been applied to describe movement between countries as in the above mentioned cases of circular and sojourner migrants. Several sets of my participants' parents were migrants for a select number of years both between the U.S. and Mexico and within the U.S., although they tended to leave their children with extended family either in the U.S. or Mexico rather than taking them on the migrant circuit.

I use the term *transnational* to refer to those individuals who have considerable life experiences on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. This definition includes objective factors such as years spent on both sides of the border and subjective factors such as both sides "feel like home" as is illustrated by Lidia's quote at the beginning to this chapter. Indeed, as will be illustrated, two home bases exist: one in Mexico and one in the U.S. More than anything, transnationalism is a state of mind. It is a unique state of consciousness that allows one to operate within and between different national, linguistic, and cultural borders without being subsumed by any one of them. Recent educational literature uses the term *binational* or *transnational* when dealing with these complexities (Rodríguez & Trueba, 1998; Trueba, 1999b; Suárez-Orozco, 1998;

Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Grossman, 2002). I have chosen transnational, rather than binational, because *trans-* implies both a sense of movement and unity between parts, while *bi-* suggests a dichotomy.

As a result of my research in this area, I believe that transnationalism must be understood to exist along a continuum in which there are degrees of transnationalism. It is as much a collective phenomenon as an individual one. Within a transnational family or community networks, transnationalism emerges across the lifespan, with transnationals drawing upon not only from their own experiences, but drawing vicariously from the experiences of their parents, siblings, etc. Transnationals have access cultural tools from both sides and from the whole of their familial transnational networks. In the case of my participants' families, transnationalism developed over time rather than as something that their parents set off to do from the very beginning. As will be illustrated with my participants, transnationalism is manifested linguistically through their use of English, Spanish, and Spanglish. It is manifested culturally in that they display a high degree of agency, selecting what they believe to be the best from both sides, at all times grounded in pragmatism rather than patriotism. They tend to reject dichotomous identities inspired by the respective nation-states.

Throughout this study, I make reference to rural areas of Nuevo Leon. I use the term as it is used by many Mexicans of this state. Rural refers to all areas outside of the Monterrey metropolitan area. Therefore, although the small city where I lived has a substantial population base, it is still considered to be rural by many Mexicans in the state. Furthermore, the city maintains a decidedly small

town feeling. Everyone seemed to know everyone, chickens roamed free in front of my house, and the nightlife consisted of sitting in rocking chairs pulled out onto the street. My participants and their families display a high degree of attachment to their particular rural area of Nuevo Leon while having no desire whatsoever to live anywhere else in Mexico including Monterrey. It would seem that the border between their rural homes and urban Monterrey looms larger than that between the U.S. and Mexico.

Pocho and its derivations (*pocha*, *pochismos*, *etc.*) are derogatory terms used on both sides of the border to refer to people, language, and cultural elements that are seen as having undergone “Americanization.” *Agringado* {gringo-ized} is another such descriptor. Despite negative connotations, I have used these terms because my participants used these terms frequently, often taking ownership of the slurs and turning them into a source of pride. I also use the term “Spanglish,” which can carry negative weight, because that is how participants most frequently referred to the phenomenon of code-switching between Spanish and English and the borrowing of English words and phrases and transforming them into Spanish. Rather than substitute translated words or phrases in English for the above mentioned terms, I have chosen to include them “as is” because they provide a greater sense of authenticity than substitutions would.

THE STUDY TAKES SHAPE

I began with a general interest in transnationalism as a result of my experience as a high school Spanish teacher in the Southwest. I knew about the

flow of people back and forth across the U.S.-Mexico border. I have had students, recent arrivals from Mexico, who had come to attend school in the U.S. with the express purpose of learning English and returning home. I have had Mexican origin students who confidently spoke Spanish with me while we were in the U.S., but who switched to speaking exclusively English as soon as we crossed the border into Mexico. I knew all too well about the separation and animosity that existed between Mexican and Mexican American students in my classroom. I had heard the comments of teachers: “Francisco (or Delila or Carlos or Jesusita) has become too Americanized,” referring to particular Mexican immigrant students. I have helped students catch up on a month’s worth of homework that piled up while they were in Mexico. I have had frustrated Mexican parents confused by the behavior and dress of their children ask me if they should send them back to Mexico to school. I never knew what to answer.

To be completely honest, when I applied for the Fulbright grant I did so in order to gain experience applying for grants. I had not actually expected to get it. Therefore, my original grant proposal was rather different from the study I ended up conducting. I had outlined a plan to conduct the research on transnational youth much further south in Mexico because I had a contact at the *Universidad de Colima* {University of Colima} who had agreed to help me gain access to the public school system. Unfortunately, between the time I applied and was awarded the grant, my contact relocated to a university in Mexico City. My contact was still willing to help, either in Mexico City or via his connections in Colima. However, on the one hand, Mexico City did not seem like an option because of

my experience: I have never taught a Mexican immigrant student nor a Mexican American student whose family was originally from Mexico City. On the other hand, I have been to Mexico City numerous times and found it to be a nice place to visit for a few days, but I would not want to live there. Colima also seemed formidable; I did not want to rely on the connections of someone who was not living there, especially since I was not that familiar with Colima.

At this point, I was ready to turn down the grant. Fortunately, several events occurred in rapid succession about the same time I had to decide to accept or decline the grant. First, I found out that education officials from Monterrey affiliated with the SEP of Nuevo Leon and English teachers working for SEP's English in Primary School Program in Nuevo Leon would be visiting the education class in which I would be working as a teaching assistant. I was certainly more comfortable with the thought of going to Monterrey than Colima, in part because of my new connections and in part because I had attended college in Monterrey in the 1980's. Second, I discovered while discussing my dilemma with a friend from South Texas that he had a cousin who was a teacher in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon. I asked his parents, whom I consider to be my "Texas parents," about this cousin. Instead of talking about the cousin, they called her immediately and informed her that I would be staying with her. Later, in fact, my Texas parents would drive me all the way to her front door. It was both fitting and auspicious that my research in Mexico would begin with the help of *mi familia* {my family}, albeit my adoptive family.

I became more convinced that Monterrey was the place to go after meeting the teachers who visited the education class. Most were from Monterrey and had provided me with their phone numbers and E-mail addresses. One in particular stood out in my mind. The professor teaching the course was talking about cultural differences and prejudice. In an attempt to engage the Mexican teachers by relating these issues to the Mexican context, he asked the question, “What is a pocho?” One of the visiting Mexican teachers, Carmela, jumped up and shouted out, “Me. I am a pocha.” The discussion then turned to the presence of *pochos*, in the classrooms of these Mexican teachers. I became convinced that I would find what I was looking for in Nuevo Leon.

I lived in Monterrey for the first two months before deciding to relocate to a rural area. The SEP officials I had met were helpful, inviting me on site visits and informing me of upcoming teacher workshops. I touched base with several teachers that I had met over the summer who lived in Monterrey. None of these teachers were transnationals, but we met for coffee or lunch and I visited them in their homes. In mid-September, a SEP workshop for the English in Primary School Program’s teachers was scheduled in Monterrey. I called Carmela, who did not live in Monterrey, for the first time to reintroduce myself and ask her if she would be attending the workshop. To say that Carmela has a warm and bubbly personality would be an understatement. The following is an excerpt from the first phone conversation I with Carmela.

Mary: Buenas tardes, ¿Podiera comunicarme con Carmela Rodríguez por favor? Me llamo Mary Petró y la conocí hace unos meses en Austin. {Good afternoon. Could I

please speak with Carmela Rodriguez? My name is Mary Petró and I met her a few months ago in Austin.}

Carmela: Hey Raza Girl, you made it. It's me, pendeja {dummy}, Carmela.

Mary: Hi, yeah I made it. I'm in Monterrey.

Carmela: So when are you coming to Montemayor to meet the family? How about this weekend? There's that SEP meeting on Saturday in Monterrey and we can come back here after together.

Mary: Sounds good to me.

Carmela: Hell yeah, let's make it a pocho weekend. I'll make meatloaf and mashed potatoes.

Mary: What can I bring?

Carmela: Nada, pues, absolutamente nada. {Nothing, absolutely nothing.} You can meet la tropa {the troops}. We'll just kick back, listen to some music, drink some Tecates y ya {beer and that's it}.

At the workshop, Carmela introduced me to Nora, who is a transnational from Lerdo. Nora is the only other transnational who had also participated in the

SEP training in Austin; however, she did not attend the education class at the University of Texas at Austin because of her mother's illness and subsequent death. After greeting us in English, Nora turned her attention to the important matter of lunch. "Alright, guys," she said, "I want Pizza Hut or Kentucky Fried. You decide." I would later find out from my transnational participants that although they generally hated to go to Monterrey, it was bearable because they had the opportunity to eat familiar foods from *el otro lado* {the other side of the border} which were not available in the rural areas where they lived.

The second half of the workshop involved team tutors meeting with groups of teachers from their area for a mentoring session. Both Carmela and Nora are team tutors. I rotated back and forth between their groups. As I listened to the teachers in these groups talk it became obvious that the majority had not learned their English in Mexico. The English I heard was not that of a Mexican foreign language learner or teacher. I asked a few of these teachers where they had learned English. "I grew up in Texas," or "I went to elementary school in California" were typical responses.

I had still not made the decision to relocate to a rural area, but I took Carmela and Nora up on their offer and visited them in Montemayor and Lerdo respectively. Rural Nuevo Leon was a pleasant break from the mad rush of Monterrey. I met their families and enjoyed the outdoor life of patio chats and *carne asada* {barbeque}. In hindsight, my delay in leaving Monterrey had more to do with my ego than with my research goals. I was proud of the fact that I was "making it" in Monterrey, negotiating the horrendous traffic, visiting old college

haunts, battling for phone service, and shadowing SEP officials. It was like an adventure game and I felt I was winning. Of course, I was not finding the population I wanted to study because in my effort to “win,” I forgot what I already knew: Much of the immigration to the U.S. from Mexico has traditionally come from rural areas, not from large urban areas like Monterrey.

A chain of events occurred that would snap me back to both reality and my research agenda. The first would be a car accident in which, fortunately, I was not at fault nor injured. This certainly made me doubt that I was “winning” in Monterrey, and negotiating with *el tránsito* {traffic police} and insurance adjusters proved to be more of a nightmare than an adventure. The second involved a phone conversation with Carmela in which she said, “I hate to tell you this, Raza girl, but everyone is asking if you are a SEP spy. I keep telling them no, but are you?” By “everyone,” Carmela meant the English in Primary School Program teachers she knew. I assured her that I was not; however, not long after this conversation one of the SEP officials asked me if I would be willing to write a report on the program. It became obvious to me that despite my cordial relationship with SEP officials, I would have to distance myself from them if I hoped to research anything. The third event involved a phone call to Nora in which I explained that I would not coming that weekend due to the accident. She sympathized with me on the horrors of driving in Monterrey and asked me why I could not do the same research in a place like Lerdo. There were lots of transnational youth there. She also told me that one of her brother’s rental houses would be vacant and that she would hold it for me if I wanted it.

I made the move to Lerdo as soon as my vehicle was repaired. At the same time, I had decided to shift my focus from transnational youth to transnational teachers for two reasons. First, I learned from SEP's coordinator of the English in Primary School Program that approximately 95 percent of the teachers working for the program in rural Nuevo Leon had attended schools in the U.S. as children and/or adolescents. Second, although I had met several transnational youths during my visits to Carmela's and Nora's, I discovered that these youths had returned to Mexico and were living with extended family members while their parents remained in the U.S. to work. Obtaining parental permission to interview minors could prove to be very problematic if most of the transnational youth were in a similar situation. In contrast, the transnational teachers were adults who were able to give their own permission. My research interest remained the same, but instead of asking transnational youth about their life and educational experiences on both sides of the border, I would be asking adult, transnational teachers of English.

THE EXTENT OF THE TRANSNATIONAL PHENOMENA

The lack of reliable statistics on both sides of the border regarding the number of transnationals currently living in Mexico is understandable for several reasons. First, while the former U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has figures on the number of individuals who are deported back to Mexico, they do not keep track of those who voluntarily leave especially along the vast U.S.-Mexico border. At many Border Patrol checkpoints entering the U.S., signs

exist listing the number of “illegal aliens” apprehended. However, no such signs exist when leaving the U.S. As one transnational I met said, “It takes five minutes to leave U.S. and three hours to get back in. Even longer at Christmas. It’s just la migra’s {INS} way of saying Feliz Navidad” {Merry Christmas}.

Second, although the Mexican government officials I have spoken with acknowledged the prevalence of transnationals in Mexico, they could provide me with no numbers. Among education officials, children of Mexicans who are legal residents of the U.S. are commonly referred to as *pasaporteados* {those with passports}, but this pertains only to those in public schools, not private, and only if these parents submit documentation of legal U.S. residence which many do not. Special programs also exist in some Mexican states for children who are involved in revolving migration, but only on a very limited basis in areas of high concentration. Therefore, even the actual numbers of children whose families engage in revolving migration is unknown.

Finally, the complicated nature of transnational experience itself serves to confound any compilation of accurate statistics on either side of the border. The realities of the transnational participants of this study reflect the complexities of transnationalism. Three are U.S. citizens by birth. However, these three had obtained Mexican birth certificates too. As one of them mentioned, “It just makes life easier here to do everything with an *acta*,” referring to her Mexican birth certificate. One of these three was born in the U.S., but lived in and currently travels to the U.S. under a permanent resident card because her birth had only been registered with a state health department and an official birth certificate was

never filed. Her parents mistakenly applied for a permanent resident card for her when she was a year old, listing her as being born on the same date, but one year later. She is eligible to apply for a delayed birth certificate as a U.S. citizen; however, additional documentation such as school records is needed. Although she has such school records, the year of birth does not coincide with the health department certificate and the social security number pertains to her permanent resident card. One is a Mexican citizen who received a permanent resident card through the amnesty of her parents as a result of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and subsequent application for family reunification. She, along with the aforementioned U.S. citizen who lives under a permanent resident card, officially claim to still live in the U.S. in order to keep their permanent resident status. Another of the participants was a permanent resident who became a naturalized U.S. citizen in order to facilitate the process of legalizing her husband, but she lives in Mexico as a Mexican citizen under her Mexican birth certificate. As she stated it, "I just change purses whenever I cross the border." Although the 1998 Mexican Nationality Law allows Mexicans who became naturalized U.S. citizens and the U.S.-born children of Mexican citizens to claim or reclaim Mexican nationality, none of these transnational participants has taken that route. They had already found creative ways around the laws of both countries because such laws in the past had never been formulated with transnationals in mind.

Despite lack of official statistics, the presence of transnationals cannot be underestimated in Mexico or in the U.S. Claudia, from San Isidro to Illinois to San Isidro, is not an anomaly. As mentioned previously, a coordinator of the

Programa de Idiomas {Language Program} for the SEP of Nuevo Leon, asserted that approximately 95 percent of the English teachers working for English in Primary School Program in the public elementary schools outside of the Monterrey metropolitan area learned their English in U.S. schools. Obviously, transnationals have become an integral part of the Mexican education system. While the above mentioned numbers of transnational English teachers pertain only to rural areas in Nuevo Leon, I have no doubt that a similar situation exists in other rural areas. The rate of immigration to the U.S. is much higher in states such as Michoacan, Guanajuato and Jalisco than it is in Nuevo Leon (Population Studies Center, 1999).

RATIONALE

Although the two nations share an immense border, here in the U.S, very little is known about the educational system of Mexico. To date, I have uncovered only a handful of studies concerning education in Mexico (Black & Cutler, 1997; Wilcox & Vidal Moreno, 1999; Macías, 1990; Martín, 1987; Calvo, 1998; LeBlanc Flores, 1996). In contrast, as part of my graduate studies in second language education, I have read countless studies dealing with language education in Canada and in Europe. As a teacher, I never once had a transfer student from Canada or Europe, but Mexican transfer students were never in short supply. Although I would like to think the language barrier is a factor in this paucity of information, I suspect that stereotypical assumptions about third world countries are to blame. As Macías (1990) states, “This stereotype follows a false

assumption that since economic or political conditions are typically worse in the sending country, every other facet of life also must have been inferior...”(p. 307). Furthermore, according to stereotypical views in the U.S., most Mexicans are trying to come to the U.S. so everything about Mexico must be substandard and of little value.

Unfortunately, federal, state, and local educational statistics demonstrate that the U.S. educational system does not necessarily have a very good track record with respect to meeting the needs of students of Mexican descent (Amodeo & Brown, 1986; Cortes, 1984; Valencia, 1991; Valencia, 2002). Clearly, we do not have all the answers on this side of the border. As the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) continues to formalize transnational economic ties, we need to begin to explore educational issues from with the same transnational perspective. This study attempts to do just that using transnational teachers of English in Mexico as basis of this exploration. As teachers, as students, as parents, and as residents on both sides of the border, these transnational individuals are in the unique position of being able to provide their view of education unobstructed by a border. Furthermore, although we are just now beginning to recognize the very existence of transnational immigrants and research in this area is still in its infancy, transnationals represent one of the fast growing types of immigrant today (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Trueba, 1999b).

As I will reiterate in later chapters, this study is descriptive, focusing on what my participants have to say about their lives and experiences. However, in

preparing this study I draw upon and significantly modified three principle theoretical strands of the literature: borderlands epistemologies, transnationalism, and cultural capital. Therefore, in addition to the descriptive nature of this study, I seek to expand upon these theoretical strands, by demonstrating the ways in which they interact and play out on the Mexican side of the border.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Although this study is descriptive, with a focus on what my participants have to say about their transnational experiences, my work is informed by and expands upon three principal strands of the literature. In the first section, I focus on the literature regarding transnationalism, with special attention to that dealing with the second generation, or the children of immigrants. In the second section, I outline Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and relate it to the specific context of rural Nuevo Leon. Finally, I describe borderlands epistemologies and the way they relate to my participants' self-concept and daily practices as well as to my position as a researcher. On the surface, these strands of the literature seem rather disparate. However, there is internal logic and coherence in that one strand flows and interacts with the other. The literature on transnationalism relates to my participants' life histories, that of cultural capital relates to their current situation in Mexico, and that of borderlands provides an overarching lens for understanding the data of this study. Yet, all three would have to be modified and expanded upon in order to make sense of the data.

TRANSNATIONALISM

Emma Lazarus' poem, *The New Colossus*, engraved on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, illustrates the quintessential American immigrant mythology. The line, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to

breathe free,” is engraved not only on the pedestal, but in the minds of the American populace. As Suárez-Orozco (1998) stated,

According to the founding myth of the nation, the exceptionalism that makes America unique is that the United States took in millions of humble foreigners and made them into successful and loyal Americans. (p. 291)

Early historians such as Handlin (1973) portrayed immigrants as humble peasant types who were thrown forcefully into modern world by the powers of capitalism. Such scholars mapped out a direct assimilation pattern whereby immigrants would soon enter the melting pot of mainstream, middle-class America. Later researchers like Bodnar (1985) have demonstrated that immigrants were already familiar with capitalism and posited that these immigrants followed “pragmatic adaptation” strategies, selecting what they believed to be most valuable from the host country. Furthermore, as Wyman (1993) has documented, immigrant families giving up on the American dream and returning to live in their homelands has always been a part of our national history.

Recent researchers (Fernandez-Kelley & Schauffler, 1994; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Rumbaut, 1994; Waters, 1994) have asserted that today’s process of assimilation for children of immigrants is “segmented,” and contingent upon the interplay of three factors: skin color and racial/ethnic prejudices found in the U.S., geographic location of residence (particularly with respect to inner-city areas), and an increasingly tight U.S. labor market in which higher paying manufacturing jobs are scarce, thereby limiting the path of upward mobility. As a

whole, this re-examination has led scholars away from a melting-pot assimilation model towards a “tossed salad,” “mosaic,” pluralist model.

Scholars have just begun to formulate a more accurate picture of immigration issues past and present. This more accurate portrayal includes attention to “transmigrants” who live within a “transnational social space” (Pries, 2001). Although scholarship on transnationalism is relatively new, the movement of Mexicans back and forth across the border is not new. George Sánchez (1993) has noted that Mexicans have a long history of border crossings. Durand (1998) has argued that circular migration, where Mexican immigrants lived both “here” and “there,” dominated the Mexican immigrant experience for decades up into the 1980’s. In that context, Suárez-Orozco and Páez (2002) have posited that “Mexican immigrants engaged in dual lives, displaying the kinds of proto-transnational behaviors now more fully developed among Caribbean Latinos” (p. 7). It must be noted, however, that Cornelius (1998) has asserted that Mexican immigrants have moved away in recent years from transnational patterns and toward permanent settlement in the U.S. He has demonstrated that over time and with subsequent generations, Mexican immigrants send less money to Mexico, visit Mexico less frequently, and are less involved with the Mexican political scene.

Arriving at a single, comprehensive definition of the term “transnationalism” is difficult, in that the field of transnational studies is its infancy and different scholars in a variety of fields have used the term to signify different phenomena (Levitt & Waters, 2002). Some have referred to

transnationalism as the shuttling back and forth between the host country and the country of origin. Others have used it to describe the segregation of immigrants in the U.S. which appears to maintain and generate cultural patterns which serve to further separate immigrants from mainstream America. Still others have applied the term to anything related to immigration and/or increasing trends toward the globalization of capitalism and culture. There is also disagreement about the relative significance of transnationalism. Some have argued that the forging of transnational links and identities represents a qualitatively new adaptive strategy being adopted by immigrants in response to economic globalization. Others have maintained that transnationalism is likely to prove a transitional phenomenon, with transnational ties gradually withering away with the passing of generations.

Kasinitz, Waters, Mollenkopf, and Anil (2002) have maintained that today, largely thanks to improved technologies of communication and transportation, transnational ties are easier to maintain than ever before: “Today’s communication and transportation technologies make it easier for immigrants to (or, as some would describe them, ‘transmigrants’) to remain embedded in the social lives of their nations of origin” (p. 96). However, they have also pointed out that improved technology alone cannot guarantee that transnational ties will persist into the second generation. In their study of second generation transnational teenagers in New York City, they have concluded that maintaining transnational ties is a possibility for at least a “substantial minority” of second generation immigrants, provided that their interaction with the ancestral country

becomes a frequent and regular part of their lives. Levitt (2002) agreed with Kasinitz et al. and outlined concrete examples of how this ongoing interaction with the ancestral country can be maintained. Her examples included the maintenance of institutional ties (e.g., through membership in transnational religious, civic, or cultural organizations), through the cultivation of transnational “seeds” (i.e. intact ties to people and communities in the ancestral homeland) planted by the first generation, and through circular migration.

Frequent, regular contact between transnationals and the ancestral country is at the heart of what Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt (1999) have defined as “core transnationalism.” Core transnationalism is transnationalism in which interaction occurs on a regular, patterned basis, and thus forms an integral part of participants’ lives. The core transnationalism of Portes et al. can be contrasted to the “broad transnational practices” described by Itzigsohn (1999). Broad transnational practices are those that occur only sporadically, involve somewhat limited levels of participation, and are not well institutionalized. A further contrast can be made with “narrow transnational practices” (Itzigsohn 1999), in which interaction is highly institutionalized, rigidly structured, and constant.

Smith (2002) studied the transnational practices of the second generation “Ticuani Youth Group,” which represented the conscious attempt to develop a second generation transnational institution. Smith has asserted that although transnational life for the second generation is different from that of the immigrant generation, it does exist.

I argue that the transnational life in the second generation: results from the second generation’s engagement with racial, gender, and class and status

hierarchies in the United States (and sometimes Mexico); evolves as a the second generation moves from adolescence into early adulthood, an important step in the life course; and reflects their attempt to keep the immigrant bargain with their parents. (p. 145-146)

Smith viewed this transnational life of the second generation as resulting from the interplay of assimilationist processes and the challenges faced by minority youth in New York City, which drew these young people into a transnational life and outlook in an effort to escape negative assimilative pressures and integration into gang culture.

Earle (1995), in his study of Texas's *colonias* {unregulated suburban/rural subdivisions} has maintained that transnationals, not being fully integrated into either Mexican or U.S. society, have in fact carved out a "third space" in which they can navigate both cultures successfully without being subsumed by either. He saw this ability to operate in both cultures as an important form of social and cultural capital: "The more binational one becomes the more successful one is at the transnational adaptation that migration, immigration to the border region, and out-migration to colonias represent" (p. 177). Like Vila (1994), Earle viewed transnationalism as much a form of adaptation to transnationals' class position as to their national/cultural identity and/or legal status: "While more established middle-class Mexican-Americans tend to bifurcate between hypernationalism towards the United States and the staunch retention of Mexican national identity, colonia residents seem to embrace both nations without much conflict" (p. 177).

Portes and Rumbaut (2001), in their study of ethnic identity as it pertains to second-generation immigrant youth in the U.S., have highlighted the

difficulties the children of immigrants can often face in trying to carve out this third space.

Situated within two cultural worlds, (the children of immigrants) must define themselves in relation to multiple reference groups (sometimes in two countries and in two languages) and to the classifications into which they are placed by their native peers, the ethnic community, and the larger society. (p. 150)

The children of immigrants do this with varying degrees of success. Those who are most successful in locating themselves within this third space are those who engage in what Portes and Rumbaut term “selective acculturation.”

This path is closely intertwined with the preservation of fluent bilingualism and linked, in turn, with higher self-esteem, higher educational and occupational expectations, and higher academic achievement....children who learn the language and culture of their new country without losing those of the old have a much better understanding of their place in the world. (p. 274)

However, as Portes and Rumbaut pointed out, “selective acculturation requires a socially and politically supportive environment where learning of English and American culture takes place in a paced fashion, without losing valuable cultural resources in turn” (2001, p. 275). Unfortunately, as I will illustrate, at present neither schools in the U.S. nor Mexico encourage selective acculturation. Rather, they tend to follow the subtractive model described by Valenzuela (1999). In the absence of institutionalized support, responsibility for the selective acculturation of immigrant youth remains “in the hands of immigrant

families and co-ethnic communities” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 275), who may or may not be up to the task.

Malkin (2003), in her study of Mexican transnational immigrants in New York state, viewed their transnational practices as an attempt to balance the positive economic and educational opportunities living in the U.S. afforded their children with the negative dangers of their potential incorporation into an urban underclass. In this way, Mexico was conceptualized in a idyllic fashion by immigrant parents as a social space where *La Familia* {the family}, and traditional values of morality and sociality could be renewed. Therefore, these immigrant parents believed that a minimum of yearly extended visits to Mexico played a critical role in the socialization of their children and served to shield them from corrupting influences in the United States. Unfortunately, such visits were viewed by school authorities in the U.S. as evidence that Mexican immigrant parents were not dedicated to their children’s academic success since they pulled their children from school for extended periods. Grossman (2001) described similar findings for Dominican transnationals.

Ogbu’s cultural ecological theory (1978, 1993, 1995, 1998) has been applied to immigrants and the children of immigrants. Ogbu distinguished between voluntary minorities, who have moved to the U.S. of their own free will, and involuntary or caste-like minorities, who were brought to or incorporated into the U.S. by means of conquest or colonization. Voluntary minorities maintain “folk theories” which include the belief in their ability to be successful through hard work and education. They maintain a “dual frame of reference,” in that they

compare their current situation to that of their home country, rather than that of the situation of the dominant group in the U.S. Thus, they see conditions in the U.S. to be superior to those which they left behind. In contrast, involuntary minorities have an “oppositional frame of reference” in which they compare their situation to that of the dominant social groups. Their “folk theories” nurtured by a long history of discrimination lead them to develop “oppositional” identities.

Ogbu’s typology has been problematic for many reasons including the fact that Latinos are not easily classified. His critics have asserted that Ogbu failed to recognize the diversity inherent in the “Hispanic” category, especially since historical factors play such a large role in Ogbu’s typology (Grossman, 2002; Foley, 1991). Each group of Latinos has experienced different waves of immigration with different class origins, social mobility patterns, and cultural frames of reference. Foley (1991), for example, demonstrated that working class “vatos” had a very different cultural frame of reference than that of middle class “Mexicanos.” Foley (1991) and Trueba (1988) have rejected Ogbu’s fatalistic view of involuntary minorities through their research on both voluntary and involuntary minorities who have been successful in school. Gibson (1997) posited that perhaps all children of immigrants should be classified as involuntary immigrants since they have little choice in the matter of immigration.

In his most recent work with Simons (1998), Ogbu has asserted that his typology was best viewed as a continuum rather than as a dichotomy. He added the category of “binationals” to the typology, placing them in between that of voluntary and involuntary. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) in their

recent work on the children of immigrants, described “transnational” or “binational” immigrants. They have asserted that while the vast majority of immigrants are in the U.S. to stay, these transnational immigrants are defined by a tendency to “shuttle” back and forth between the country of origin and the host country. However, neither Ogbu and Simons (1998) nor Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) attribute definite frames of reference to these types of immigrants.

As my study will illustrate, it appears transnationals have shifting, multiple frames of reference at least when studied from the vantage point of Mexico. Since the bulk of the above mentioned research on frames of reference arose in the context of the U.S., it fails to take into key factors that play out in the country of origin. For example, my participants faced rejection and discrimination in Mexico because of their transnational experiences. It also fails to take into consideration the origin class position of the parents. As this study will illustrate, my participants are very aware that they are the children of rural, marginalized working class parents who attribute their subsequent rise in social class solely to the benefits acquired through immigration and their parents’ working class values. Both of these factors have significant effects on my participants’ frames of reference.

Just as it is difficult to get a handle on what exactly constitutes transnationalism, it is difficult to determine its prevalence in the U.S. Upon inspection, a contradictory picture emerges. Transnationalism appears to be widespread, at least within the realm of public perception (Suárez-Orozco &

Suárez-Orozco, 2001). For example, in West Sacramento, California, the Washington Unified School District extended a winter break in an effort to boost attendance of those students who travel to Mexico for the holiday (Associated Press, 2003). According to the superintendent of the district, Stuart Greenfeld, “This reflects the needs of the community.” Since announcing the modified schedule, he has spoken with school officials from California to Wisconsin who are also interested in similar modifications. Santa Maria Joint Union High School District implemented a similar schedule at its three high schools seven years before for the same reason.

Yet evidence of high numbers of transnational children of immigrants which the above news report suggests, are not necessarily reflected in the literature on transnationalism. Research indicates that the actual numbers of transnational immigrants are low when compared to other immigrants who settle permanently in the U.S. Rumbaut (2002), utilizing data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey and the 1991-2001 Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study, estimated relatively low figures for sustained transnational attachment for the children of Mexican immigrants, somewhere in the neighborhood of 15 percent, on the subjective factor where both countries “felt like home” (p. 76). Although he attempted to tease out the diverse elements involved in classifying the children of immigrants by including the 1.5 generation (those who arrived in the U.S. as children age seventeen and younger) and the 2.5 generation (those born in the U.S. with one foreign born and one U.S. born parent), he concluded that for the second generation:

...the great majority of the new second generation (1.5ers and 2.5ers now included), let alone a third generation still in gestation, what the empirical tea leaves seem to suggest (in English) is that theirs is an American future, not a bilingual or a binational one. (p. 90)

Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001), reflecting upon the transnational practices of immigrant groups in general (including those of Mexican origin), have asserted that “the claims that immigrant children today are deeply engaged in ‘transnational shuttling’ are inflated” (p. 30). The ability to engage in such back and forth movement, they have claimed is dependent upon three factors: financial resources of the parents, legal status, and geographical location of the country of origin (p. 31). They, too, have posited that those immigrants and their children for whom transnationalism is a way of life represent a small subset of the total number of immigrants and children of immigrants.

The problem I encountered with the bulk of the literature on transnationalism is two-fold. First, as illustrated above, there is a good deal of disagreement on what constitutes transnationalism and the prevalence of the phenomenon. Taken as a whole, the literature on transnationalism suggests that transnational ties and practices, however they may be defined, tend to be present in a minority of immigrants and their children in the U.S. Furthermore, such ties and practices tend to be less developed or tend to diminish in the second generation (children of immigrants) than for first generation immigrant parents. The second problem deals with the context of the phenomenon. The bulk of the literature on transnationalism has arisen from the context of the U.S. Such research focuses on the ways in which transnational ties and practices are maintained from the U.S. with the country of origin by immigrants and their

children. In contrast, I conducted my research in Mexico on the adult children of immigrants to the U.S. who now live and work in Mexico.

The view of transnationalism I present is that of the second generation, children of immigrants to the U.S., from the context of the Mexican side of the border. I define my participants as second generation transnationals based on several objective factors. First, my participants have all had significant life experiences (dating from birth or a very young age) in the U.S. and, of course, in Mexico. The work history of their parents, for the most part, has taken place in the U.S. and not in Mexico. Although these parents may have begun as sojourner or circular migrants; they settled more or less permanently in the U.S. (with extended visits to Mexico) at some point fairly early on in their work history. However, retiring to Mexico remained part of their life plans. These participants have siblings who live and work on both sides of the border. The transnational ties and practices that these participants maintain with the U.S. are constant and on-going. They have passed on, or intend to pass on legal status in the U.S., and the cultural elements they acquired in the U.S, including English, to their own children. I also define them and they tend to define themselves as transnational individuals based on subjective factors such as both countries “feel like home.” Although these participants do not use the term “transnational”, they tend to view themselves as different from non-transnational Mexicans or “Mexican Mexicans” as one of these participants referred to them.

Research on immigrant parents and their children who live and/or work in Mexico is relatively scant. Pries (2001) conducted primarily quantitative

fieldwork in Mexico and New York City involving the complete work, life and migration trajectories of a total of 647 individuals originally from the Mexican states of Puebla and Tlaxcala. He argued that “transmigrants,” or those that settle in the U.S. for several years, return to Mexico for several years, and so on, have created transnational social spaces. He defined these transnational social spaces as “pluri-local frames of reference which structure everyday practices, social positions, employment trajectories and biographies, and human identities, and simultaneously exist *above and beyond* the social contexts of national societies” (p. 65). Trueba (1999b) noted that research centers in Mexico, such as those at the University of Colima and the Tamaulipas Research Center, are beginning to collect data on the “binational experience and lives of the increasing number of repatriated workers in Mexico” (p. 119). To date, I have been unable to uncover any published studies regarding research in this area in Mexico.

As a whole, Mexican statistics are problematic with respect to the classification of transnationals for a variety of reasons. Both undocumented and documented residents of the U.S. are still Mexican citizens and are categorized as such. Therefore they do not show up as anything other than Mexican citizens. Children of Mexican immigrants may indeed be U.S. citizens by birth. However, the official number of U.S. citizens living in Mexico appears to be slight. Mexican census information (Consejo Nacional de Población, 2001) indicated that in the year 2000, approximately half a million persons residing in Mexico were foreign-born. Of this number 63 percent of the total was born in the U.S. This number says little, as I discovered through this research. All of my

participants and their family members who had been born in the U.S. also possess Mexican birth certificates. Even those who had become naturalized U.S. citizens continue to live in Mexico as Mexican citizens utilizing their Mexican birth certificates and voter registration cards.

Despite my inability to find anything in the way of studies and official statistics during my time in Mexico, I was surrounded by anecdotal evidence while in Nuevo Leon. State government officials, education officials, teachers, and other non-transnational Mexicans I spoke with acknowledged the prevalence of transnationals in Nuevo Leon. They usually referred them to as *pochos*, but quickly self-corrected to *mexicano-americanos* {Mexican Americans} in recognition of the fact they were speaking with a *pocha* who might find the term offensive.

The children of immigrants to the U.S. who transfer into Mexican schools were also frequently mentioned by teachers and education officials. In these rural areas, almost every classroom I visited had at the very least one child/adolescent who had been in U.S. schools. Over all, the prevailing attitude appears to be as Macías (1990) stated, “Although smaller in number, Mexican educators are quite concerned about these U.S.-Mexico transfers, even if out’a sight, out’a mind for school personnel in the United States” (p. 295). Complaints concerning the behavior of these children surfaced constantly among non-transnational teachers and education officials.

Education officials sometimes referred to a particular subset of the children of Mexicans who are legal residents or citizens of the U.S. as

pasaporteados {those with passports}. However, any official tallies of these children reflect little about the overall numbers of children with schooling experiences on both sides of the border because this pertains only to those in public schools, not private, and only if these parents submit such documentation which many do not. Special programs also exist in Nuevo Leon for children who are involved in a consistent pattern of revolving migration (six months in Mexico, six months in the U.S.), but only on a very limited basis and in only areas of high concentration. Thus, even the actual numbers of children whose families engage in revolving migration is unknown.

Mexican education officials in Nuevo Leon involved in the English in Primary School Program asserted that approximately 95 percent of the programs teachers in rural areas of the state were *mexicano-americanos* (Mexican Americans). This classification carries with it a double meaning. First, it referred to the fact that these teachers are considered to be native speakers of English. Second, there is something “different” about them which makes them seem “less Mexican” at least in the minds of these education officials. Are all of these aforementioned teachers transnationals? Perhaps not. However, all those I came into contact with during my fourteen months in Nuevo Leon, as well as the five that form the basis of this study, fit the definition of transnational I outlined above. Taken as a whole, this anecdotal evidence, although not precisely quantifiable, suggests that the transnational community in Nuevo Leon is not insignificant.

CULTURAL CAPITAL

Bourdieu (1986) distinguished between three types of cultural capital: embodied, objectified and institutionalized. The embodied state of cultural capital is incorporated within an individual and represents the sum total of what an individual knows, understands and can do. The embodied state of cultural capital can be increased through efforts of self-improvement such as education. The objectified state is cultural capital as it exists in things such books, art, or technological artifacts like computers. The institutionalized state of cultural capital refers to the possession of officially sanctioned credentials such as a diploma.

Linguistic capital, in the form of a prestige dialect is often referenced separately, but in effect falls within the realm of the embodied state of cultural capital. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), among others, have highlighted the importance and value of linguistic capital especially with regard to academic success and social mobility. In my research, linguistic capital refers not to a prestige dialect, but to a prestige language, in this case English. My participants knowledge of English is inseparable from their broader knowledge of U.S. culture. Thus, while I may make references to English as cultural capital, this should also be understood to include relevant cultural knowledge.

Bourdieu (1984, 1986, 1991, 1993; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) focused on cultural capital as something possessed in quantity by members of the middle and (especially) upper classes. The particular *kinds* of cultural capital that the middle and upper classes tend to

possess (e.g. their ability to speak in prestige dialects, their familiarity with the conventions of academic writing, their knowledge and appreciation of “high culture,” etc.) are precisely those that are valued by societal institutions of power. In this context, cultural capital functions as an instrument of social reproduction, shoring up the already significant economic and social advantages enjoyed by the middle and upper classes vis-à-vis the working class. The bulk of their research has involved what are essentially elite, urban forms of cultural capital, particular to the context of France, and the role which schools play in this process of social reproduction. In sum, schools value the forms of cultural capital more commonly possessed by members of the middle and upper classes, while denigrating the forms of cultural capital of the working classes which are seen to have little value.

Scholars in the field of minority education in the U.S. have adopted this concept of cultural capital in the form of a subtractive assimilation argument. Schooling in the U.S. plays a role in the reproduction of social and racial hierarchies by validating the cultural knowledge and linguistic forms of White, middle class children while devaluing those which minority children often bring to the classroom (Cummins, 1984, 1986; Gibson, 1993; Bartolomé, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999). This is particularly true for language minority children. Trueba (1999b) states,

In mainstream society, the practice of learning from and valuing student language and life experiences occurs in classrooms where students speak a language and possess cultural capital closely matching those of the society at large. That is precisely what needs to happen for culturally different children. (p. 57)

Thus, in order to promote academic success of Mexican origin children, for example, it is necessary to utilize the linguistic and cultural knowledge they bring to the classroom. Research has demonstrated that Mexican origin children have access to vast “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) which are embedded within their familial and community networks.

Unfortunately, in recent years, the U.S. has seen a resurgence of anti-immigrant sentiment in general, and anti-Mexican immigrant sentiment in particular (Macedo & Bartolomé, 1998; Trueba, 1999b; Rosaldo, 1997; McLaren, 2000; Suárez-Orozco, 1998). California’s proposition 187, which sought to deny public education and other services to undocumented workers and to their children regardless of whether or not these children were U.S. citizen by birth, was clearly aimed primarily at the Mexican immigrant population. For the most part in the U.S., “illegal alien” is synonymous with Mexican. It is also telling that English-Only referendums have passed primarily in states with large numbers of Spanish speakers. Thus, in the U.S. today, the linguistic and cultural knowledge of Mexican origin individuals is highly suspect. As I will illustrate below, the context of Mexican society is much more conducive to the maintenance of English language skills and utilization of U.S. cultural knowledge.

In this study, I borrow Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, albeit in a modified form, and apply it to the linguistic and cultural knowledge my participants acquired as a result of their transnational experiences. In order to understand how this plays out in the lives of my participants, it is necessary to

elaborate on several key points because the context of rural Mexico has implications for the relative value of the cultural capital my participants acquired in the U.S. Certainly, it was not validated while they were students in Mexican schools. To a large extent, they experienced the same subtractive assimilation pressure as many Mexican origin children/adolescents do in U.S. schools. However, Mexico remains economically subordinate to the U.S. even as their economies are becoming increasingly integrated. Thus, Mexico is expected to meet the linguistic and cultural expectations of U.S. business interests (to say nothing of the tourist industry). This economic superiority has a parallel in the intellectual arena as is evidenced by the fact that the last four presidents of Mexico (Miguel de la Madrid, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Ernesto Zedillo, and Vicente Fox) all attended U.S. universities.

In other words, English and U.S. cultural knowledge is increasingly viewed by the upper and middle classes, even in these rural areas of Mexico, as an indispensable form of cultural capital. While none of my participants speak a prestige dialect of English, they do possess native or native-like proficiency along with extensive practical knowledge of U.S. culture and cultural artifacts which originate in the U.S. For example, twenty years ago, one of my participants was asked to translate an instruction manual by her future employer, who was unable to operate the VCR he had purchased in the U.S. She was able to accomplish this task easily because of her English proficiency and prior knowledge of VCR's. As a result of transnational connections, she had owned a VCR long before they became commonplace in this area of Mexico.

Bourdieu emphasized the importance of prestige dialects, but in these areas of Mexico, whether or not one speaks a prestige dialect of English appears to be irrelevant. English is, however, considered a prestige language and my participants are immediately classified as native speakers of English because of their fluency and native-like pronunciation. Acquiring this level of proficiency is at best a long and difficult process for the average English as a foreign language professional in Mexico. Therefore, although they would not possess a valuable form of cultural capital in the U.S. as defined by Bourdieu, in Mexico they are in demand. In fact, they possess these forms of cultural capital in far greater quantity than most members of the Mexican middle class. My participants have been able to trade this cultural capital for both economic and social advancement. For example, they are all employed and respected as teachers of English, despite their lack of officially sanctioned credentials. While they have, at times, faced difficulties by their being branded as *pochos*, the monetary value of what they know is substantial in the world of work. In part, these difficulties stem from their original class position as children of the rural marginalized working poor. Because established middle class Mexicans have to pay a great deal of money to acquire this cultural capital for themselves and their children, my participants are often viewed as having obtained it unfairly because they did not acquire it via traditional channels in Mexico.

BORDERLANDS EPISTEMOLOGIES

Gloria Anzaldúa, in the preface to the first edition of her seminal work, *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, defined the borderlands as follows:

The actual physical borderland that I'm dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S. Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the Southwest. In fact, the Borderlands are physically present whenever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (1987)

Borderlands, therefore, represent more than the area surrounding the physical dividing line between two nation-states. They represent the juxtaposition, interaction and melding of cultures, social classes, sexes and races.

Ernst-Slavit (2000) offered a definition of borderlands that is similar to (albeit less literary than) Anzaldúa's: "Borderlands are those unintentional, multicultural spaces where cultures meet, where those living on the edges discover similar shared beliefs and rituals and are able to construct new ones" (p. 251). Although differing in their exact terminology, other scholars have also embraced the borderlands concept. George (1993) made reference to "cultural fusion." Berman (1982) described borderlands as exemplifying a "unity of disunity." Renato Rosaldo (1993) has written of "border crossers"—a reference to those who exist within the indeterminate physical, social, and cultural space borderlands represent. As Wellman (1996) stated, "Border cultures produce identities that are neither singular nor static. In these locations, multiple cultural identities are invented, and people slip into and out of them without being called upon to renounce their initial identifiers" (p. 37).

Borderlands, as a discourse and the ways of knowing of people who live between different worlds, has been taken up by some Chicana/o scholars in the 1980's and 1990's in a wide range of fields, from literary criticism to critical

ethnography. Such scholars themselves are a people in-between U.S. and Mexican cultures “with identities that are in constant flux” (Elenes, 1997, p. 359). As Foley and Villenas (2002) state,

The border, borderlands, and border crossing are a shared and collective naming of the cultural and bodily experiences under Spanish and U.S. colonialism, and U.S. and México nationalisms... It is the present and future way of being in the world – the juggling cultures and of embracing ambiguity, struggle and solidarities across heterogeneities, while rejecting modernist nationalisms even as we live under modernist oppressions. (p. 201)

It is this life in the margins, on the border, in the “third space” between cultures that frames my study.

Concha Delgado-Gaitán and Enrique Trueba, through their use of borderlands ways of knowing uncovered the multi-faceted literate, oral and pedagogical worlds of Mexicano families in the U.S. (Delgado-Gaitán, 1987; Trueba, 1991; Delgado-Gaitán & Trueba, 1991). Arguing against a cultural deficit model and armed with solid ethnographic documentation of the rich linguistic and cultural environment in the homes and communities of the Mexicano children under study, they demonstrated that the children were most certainly not linguistically, culturally, or cognitively deficient.

Latino researchers have been instrumental in contrasting the Mexican concept of *educación*, with its broad base of both academic knowledge and familial training in moral, social, and personal responsibility with the narrower U.S. concept of education (Darder, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). Valdés (1996) captured the importance of *respeto* {respect} in the socialization process of the Mexican origin families and children she studied. She defined *respeto* as “a set of

attitudes toward individuals and/or the roles they occupy” (p. 130). Thus, *respeto* involves the recognizing the traditional roles played by family members, as well as the ability to behave in accordance with one’s given role. Learning to be respectful often involves explicit teaching via *consejos* (advice homilies). Delgado-Gaitán (1994) has illustrated the centrality of *consejos* as a cultural tool by which Mexican origin parents teach lessons in morality and cultural values. She described such *consejos* as “cultural narratives of nurturing through a cultural domain of communication, imbued with emotional empathy, compassion, and familial expectations” (p. 314).

López (2001) expanded upon the concept of parental involvement in the educational success of their children. He has demonstrated how the Mexican immigrant parents in his study were very involved in ensuring their children did well in U.S. schools by teaching them about the strenuous nature and poor remuneration of agricultural work and the importance of doing well in school so as to not suffer the same fate. In this manner, López has challenged the hegemonic discourse of parental involvement which generally relates to specific practices such as volunteering in schools, attending PTA meetings and supplementing classroom instruction by helping children with their homework.

Guerra (1998) in his study of the language and literacy practices of a Mexicano family network in Chicago and Guanajuato demonstrated how the Durán family recreated “the vibrant communal life they had shared in their respective ranchos” (p. 65). He, in a similar fashion to Valdés (1996), demonstrated how their perceptions of success were very much rooted in social

responsibility to the transnational family network. Pimental (2000) has further explored a Mexican definition of success, which includes being a good person and the sharing of material wealth with loved ones.

Gándara (1995) has asserted that “family stories” which told of past glories served as cultural capital for working class Chicanos who were succeeding in higher education. The past glories encompassed a family history of wealth and/or high levels of education in Mexico or of family fortunes that were lost as a result of the Mexican Revolution. Therefore, there was a structural, rather than an individual explanation, for these current Chicanos’ working class position. She has speculated that these stories may have been apocryphal, but that mattered little because the stories “represented the creation of a history that would break the links between the parents’ current occupational status and their children’s future academic attainment” (p. 55).

Yet, a borderlands perspective is not just rooted in unearthing practices of subordinate communities and contrasting such practices with those of the dominant cultures. Those who take a borderlands perspective seek to “explain the social conditions of subjects with hybrid identities” (Elenes, 1997, p. 359). Yet, the notion of hybridity with its roots in biology connotes a fixed, static state – an entity produced by crossing breeding. Although I relate to the melding such borderlands scholars attempt to document, I reject the terminology because my participants’ identities are more fluid than the word *hybrid* seems to suggest.

Vásquez, Pease-Álvarez, and Shannon (1994) drew on each of the three researchers’ independent ethnographic studies conducted in a Mexicano

community in California. They highlighted the diversity of language use within the Mexican origin community, demonstrated the interaction between the Anglo and Mexicano communities, and emphasized the similarities in language use between home, community, and school worlds. Instead of a cultural discontinuity perspective which posits a dichotomy between home and school, U.S. and Mexicano, they argued for a “recognition perspective”.

The result has been the formulation of the “recognition perspective,” a view that goes beyond the simple comparative stance implicit in the discontinuity perspective to capture the similarities in language across various contexts, and the uniqueness of language use practices fostered by Mexican culture. (p.11)

Via their strong ethnographic fieldwork, they were able to capture the “rich and creative borderland of interchanging identities of Mexicano, Latino, immigrant, Mexican American, Chicano and American” (p. 12).

González (2001), utilizing a framework of language socialization, has uncovered the complexities of daily interactions of Mexican origin families in the U.S. borderlands. She argued that Mexican-origin, English-dominant children forge a linguistic identity which includes Spanish in that “the ties that bind are laced with Spanish inflections, linking social memory to a subaltern counterdiscourse of personhood” (p. xx). Furthermore, González has posited that borderland women are constantly tinkering with the past and present and “generate an ethos, at times in direct contradiction of their upbringing, within which they hope their children will flourish. Past and present mesh to give a new vibrancy and vitality to tradition and ritual” (p. xx). In a similar vein, Zentella (1997) studied the language practices of Puerto Rican origin youth in New York.

She argued that “their code switching was a way of saying that they belonged to both worlds, and should not be forced to give up one for the other” (p. 114).

Numerous researchers have documented the “funds of knowledge” which exist in families and communities of Mexican origin (Moll, Amanti, Neff & González, 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). “Funds of knowledge” refer to the cultural artifacts and knowledge bases that underlie household activities and contribute to the families’ survival and well-being. The expertise accessible through family networking and information sharing demonstrates a high level of knowledge from diverse fields ranging from animal husbandry to plumbing. Trueba (1999a) extended this concept of funds of knowledge integrating it with Freirian and Vygotskian principals to form a “Vygotskian pedagogy of hope”.

I was drawn to the literature representing borderlands epistemologies both as a result of the data I was gathering and my experience as a *pocha* researcher in Mexico. The data itself led me, as it has other researchers, to discard the physical border dividing Mexico from the U.S. and the dichotomous division between nation-states. As Enrique Murrillo, Jr. (1999) asserted,

The modern concept of community, based on the nation-state, common language, and experience has long become incapable to gain an understanding of the fragmented and often paradoxical identities that are negotiated between worlds, intersecting economics, and distinct socio-cultural spaces. (p. 16)

He continued describing his role as a *mojado* ethnographer, using the word *mojado* {wetback}, in reference to the crossing of the Rio Grande by undocumented Mexicans, as a metaphorical positioning which denotes an “experiential and culturally-genealogical tool to make meaning of cultural, racial,

ethnic, discursive, political, theoretical, and even class crossings into ethnography and academia” (p. 19). Not meaning to make light of the real dangers which undocumented Mexicans face when crossing in order to find work in the U.S., I crossed into Mexico looking for work, (albeit of the research variety), without “legal cultural credentials.” I was a *pocha*, who had to depend upon the aid of fictive family relations and my fellow border-crossing participants to watch out for me and show me the ropes as I made the journey in reverse.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

The theoretical perspectives, transnationalism, cultural capital and borderlands epistemologies, previously explained emerged during the course of this study. Almost immediately, I was confronted by the realization that my participants saw themselves as somehow different from non-transnationals or, as they termed them, “Mexican-Mexicans.” Transnationals teachers of English often clustered together and stood apart from non-transnationals teachers of English at educational conferences; they normally spoke to each other in English or Spanglish, while their non-transnational peers spoke exclusively in Spanish. My participants identified very strongly with me as a fellow *pocha*.. It was very clear that while some of my participants had not actually lived in the U.S. for some years, their experiences living in the U.S., as well as their subsequent return to Mexico, had had a powerful effect in shaping a borderlands consciousness and still did. Furthermore, they traveled to the U.S. frequently and had siblings and often parents in the U.S. who visited frequently. And, as I soon found out, every one of my participants had plans for their own children (or future children) to attend school in the U.S. as they themselves had done. Any notions I might have had about these participants reverting to some kind of essential “Mexicaness” now that they had returned to Mexico were quickly dispelled. Individually these three theoretical perspectives are inadequate. It is only through the modification and interaction of the three that I am able to make sense of the data.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this qualitative study, presented in a descriptive case study format, I hope to shed light on the transnational experience as it presents itself in the lives of five transnational teachers of English in rural Nuevo Leon, Mexico who acquired their English in the U.S. as the children of Mexican immigrants. I utilized a variety of different methods of data collection including in-depth phenomenological interviewing, ethnographic participant observation in their homes and teaching environments, and examination of personal, official and professional artifacts. The overarching research questions which guided this study are as follows:

1. How do these transnational teachers describe, compare, and contrast their educational experiences in the U.S. and Mexico?
2. How do their transnational understandings play out in their personal and professional lives?

Subsumed within these questions and in accordance with the above mentioned descriptive intent, I seek to describe how their transnational perspectives unfold in their daily lives in Mexico. The names of the participants and the names of these rural areas are pseudonyms.

METHODOLOGY

I chose to pursue my research via a qualitative approach because I was primarily interested in documenting how particular transnationals living in Mexico view their life and educational experiences on both sides of the border

from their current context of Mexico. I felt that a qualitative approach would be most appropriate because as Merriam (1998) states, “Qualitative researchers *are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed*, that is how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 6). In this way, I want to present a snapshot of their lives as close as possible to their own perspectives and incorporating their own words to a large degree. The snapshot is a close-up view, rather than a panoramic view, of transnationalism. I felt it was crucial to ground this study in their words and their context because as Sierra (1998) states,

Pues, es en las prácticas conversacionales donde los individuos construyen su identidad, el orden y el sentido (inter-dicción) de la sociedad, según el contexto en el que viven. A partir de las prácticas conversacionales, el sujeto se diferencia y distancia de los otros. Y, por supuesto, también se identifica con los otros. (p. 297-298) {Then, it is in conversational practices where individuals construct their identity, order and sense (interdiction) of society, according to the context in which they live. Via conversational practices, the subject differentiates and distances him or herself from others. And, of course, also identifies with others.}

Obviously, the context of Mexico is of great importance which is in accordance with the tenets of qualitative research because it assumes that “human behavior is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 5). Yet, unfortunately, it is a context about which little is known, at least within confines of research normally accessible to the U.S. educational community. Although relatively speaking a great deal is known about the lives and educational experiences of Mexican immigrants in the U.S., little is known about what happens to these same immigrants or their children if or when they return to Mexico. Therefore, the overall purpose of my study is by necessity

descriptive in nature. For this reason, I selected a descriptive case study as the most appropriate format. As Merriam (1998) pointed out, descriptive case studies are important in that they provide “basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted” (p. 38).

DATA COLLECTION

Sample Selection

During my fourteen month stay in Mexico, I collected data on ten transnational teachers of English in rural Nuevo Leon. I began this study with a sample of convenience, with the aforementioned transnational teachers, Carmela and Nora. Using these individuals as a point of departure, I soon branched out into “snowball” sampling (Merriam, 1998, p. 63). Both of these individuals are teacher-tutors in charge of mentoring other teachers in the English in Primary School Program. By attending their tutorial sessions in rural Nuevo Leon, I was able to network with the other transnational teachers in their groups. In addition, I met another participant because I gave her the oral exam required of prospective teachers by the SEP. The ten participants I initially ended up with consisted of transnational teachers who agreed to be interviewed and observed. I limited my search to a one to two hour radius from my home in Lerdo because travel in Mexico, especially in rural areas, can be somewhat difficult.

After analyzing all of my data and beginning to write, I realized that it would be unwieldy to try and include all the participants. Truthfully, I believe I have enough data for at least one rather long book if not two. Since I want the

emphasis to be on the actual words of my participants and include a thick description of both them and their transnational lives in the context of Mexico, I felt it was necessary to limit the number I included in this study. Therefore, I re-examined all of my participants and chose to focus on five based on two factors: years of schooling on both sides of the border and ongoing transnational ties within the immediate family. With respect to the first factor, all the participants are teaching English in Mexican public schools and are quite familiar with them as a result. However, I felt by concentrating on those with the most experience as students, not just as teachers, I would be able to add more depth of understanding to the overall phenomena of transnationalism. For this reason, I have chosen not to include four of the original pool of participants. Two had attended school for only two years in Mexico before completing the rest of their schooling in the U.S. Two other participants had completed all of their schooling in the U.S., although their own children have attended in schools on both sides of the border.

With respect to the second factor, I made this decision based on the fact that nine of the participants had originally been in the U.S. with their parents because their parents made the decision to immigrate to the U.S. for economic reasons. Only one of the participants attended school in the U.S. because her sister had married an Anglo man and moved to the U.S. Her seven other siblings and her mother remained in Mexico, although all but one would end up migrating¹

¹ Mexico, in general, and Nuevo Leon, in particular, has experienced a depopulation of rural areas as a result of two forms of migration: immigration to the U.S. and migration to large urban centers such as Monterrey. The Monterrey metropolitan area is currently Mexico's second largest industrial center and third largest in terms of population; 83 % of the population of the state of Nuevo Leon is concentrated in the Monterrey metropolitan area (Instituto Nacional de Administración Pública, 1997)

to Monterrey. In other words, the majority of her siblings made the decision to migrate internally rather than externally in order to improve their economic situation. This participant currently has one of her grandnieces (granddaughter of her sister who lived in the U.S.) living with her, but since this sister passed away this participant has not visited the U.S. and the sister's daughter rarely visits. Therefore, her continuing transnational ties within the immediate family are considerably less than the rest of the participant pool. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants whom I chose not to include, while Table 2 lists the five I decided to focus on. Using these two criteria, the five participants included in this study represent a variety of ages and include individuals with schooling experiences at elementary and secondary school levels. In this way, I was able to "bind" the participants into a more cohesive whole in order to facilitate the process of describing patterns or themes which emerged from the data.

The other five participants I chose not to include are not in any way less interesting, less relevant, less transnational, or less of anything. Although I re-analyzed the data after narrowing the participant pool to five, I recognize that the other five had an effect on how I viewed the data even upon re-analysis because my understanding of transnationalism includes all of these ten. The data collection process outlined below was the same for all ten participants and many of the themes discussed in this study initially emerged from the data of all ten. However, I want to provide both substantial background on my participants and focus on what each had to say, rather than giving a more generalized summary

Table 1

Participant	Age	Schooling in Mexico	Schooling in U.S.	Immediate family in U.S.	Immediate family in Mexico
Jesusita	39	1-6 –public 2 yrs. <i>secundaria</i> - public	9-12 public Texas	1 sister (deceased three months prior to the study), 1 niece, 2 grandnieces (granddaughters of sister)	Mother, 7 siblings, 1 grandniece (granddaughter of sister living with Jesusita)
Jimena (sister of Roberto)	38	1-2 – private	1-3- public California 4-12- public Texas 2 yrs. community college Texas	cousins/aunts/uncles	Parents, 1 brother, 2 sisters, husband, 1son, 1 daughter
Roberto (brother of Jimena)	38	1-2 – private	1-3- public California 4-12- public Texas 2 yrs. community college Texas	cousins/aunts/uncles	Parents, 3 sisters
Carmela	49	None	1-12- public California	1 brother, 3 sisters, 1 daughter	Husband, 1 daughter
Angela	30	None	1-8-private California 9-12 – private 4 yrs. univ. –private	cousins/aunts/uncles, three of her husband’s brothers	Mother, husband, 2 daughters

Table 2

Participant	Age	Schooling in Mexico	Schooling in U.S.	Immediate family in U.S.	Immediate family in Mexico
Nora ²	36	“GED” <i>primaria</i> , <i>secundaria</i> 2 yrs. adult <i>prepa</i> - public 3 yrs. secretarial- private 2 yrs. business- private 2 yrs. university- public	1 - 8-public California	3 brothers, 1 sister	Father, daughter
Laura ³	31	4th -public 5-6-private 2 yrs. <i>secundaria</i> - private 3 yrs. <i>prepa</i> -private 1 yr. secretarial - private	K- 4, public Colorado	Parents, 2 brothers	Husband, son
Carely ⁴	20	K-private 6-private 3yrs. <i>secundaria</i> - private 2yrs. <i>prepa</i> -private 2 yrs. <i>normal</i>	1-5, public Texas	Mother, 2 sisters	Grandfather, husband, son
Elvira ⁵	19	1-6- public 3 yrs. <i>secundaria</i> - public	10-12- public, Texas	2 brothers, parents	2 brothers, 4 sisters
Lidia	21	1-2 – private 2 yrs. <i>secundaria</i> - private	Pre-K – K- 3-6, 9-12 public 1 yr. univ. Illinois	Parents, 3 brothers, 1 sister	1 sister, 1 brother

² Nora opted to repeat elementary and junior high school in Mexico via a “GED” type program rather than rely on education officials to validate her transcripts from the U.S in a timely manner.

³ The wife and daughter of Laura’s youngest brother live in Mexico while her brother works in the U.S.

⁴ Carely’s father is Mexican American, but she has had no contact with him and is currently trying to ascertain his whereabouts in order to legalize her son.

⁵ One of Elvira’s brothers, who is unmarried, moves back and forth between Mexico and the U.S. every six months or so. I have listed him as living in Mexico because according to Elvira that is where he really wants to live. Elvira’s parents also spend about half the time in both countries. I have listed them as living in Mexico because Elvira said it was her parents dream to retire in Mexico.

with a few quotations for flavor. By limiting the number of participants, I am to provide a more in-depth view of each particular transnational experience as well as highlight the diversity of ways they described their experiences. Taking a cue from Ruth Behar's 1993 work, *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story*, I have chosen to include lengthy quotes from my participants.

In-depth Phenomenological Interviews

One of the primary data collection strategies I used consisted of in-depth phenomenological interviews, conducted in accordance with the three step process outlined by Seidman (1998):

The first interview establishes the context of the participants' experiences. The second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them. (p.11)

Accordingly, the first interview entailed a focused life history, concentrating on the participants' educational experiences on both sides of the border. The second interview concentrated on their present experience, as residents and teachers of English in Mexico. Finally, in the last interview, participants were asked to reflect on what it means to be a transnational living and teaching in Mexico and where they saw themselves ten years from now.

Participants were free to use the language in which they felt most comfortable. Most of the interviews ended up being in English or at the very least, *miti-miti* {half and half}, in both languages, even when I initially asked

questions in Spanish. Worried that my language skills in Spanish were deficient, I asked my participants why they would often switch to English. Their responses were similar to Nora's, "English is a part of who I am and I often don't have the opportunity to show that part of me here."

I was able to interview four of the five participants three times. One of the participants, Lidia, decided to return to the U.S. to live after spending the past two years in Mexico. Therefore, I was only able to interview her once in person and once by phone before she left. I decided to include her as a participant since as she phrased it, "I love Mexico and would like to stay here, but it's just not right for me, right now." I felt her return to the U.S. provides a dimension characteristic of the transnational experience.

Each of the three interviews was audio-taped and ranged from two to three hours in length. I transcribed the interviews myself and provided participants with copies of the transcripts. I informed them that they were free to delete anything which made them uncomfortable. In general, they were bothered by the number of times they said "like" or "o sea" {that is} and any grammatical mistakes they made. I told them that oral language is always filled with false starts, repetitions, filler words and grammatical mistakes. However, most requested that I delete words that made them "sound stupid." Although I assured participants that I would not share their complete transcripts with anyone except them, two of the participants requested that I remove information and comments they did not want their children or their supervisors to know. I have respected the

wishes of the participants in all cases. I have also agreed to share this dissertation with them in its final form.

Informal Participant Observation

During the fourteen months I spent in Mexico collecting data for this study, these participants opened their homes to me. Although I made it clear at the outset what my research interests were, my participants knew that I was in Mexico *sin familia* {without family}, and consequently they made me a part of their lives. My visits were often more social than “investigative.” I ate meals with them, played with their children, attended family functions such as birthday parties, watched television, and spoke with them on the phone. While I cannot claim to have captured every moment I spent with my participants, I did systematically jot down notes in a small notebook I always had with me. I would use this notebook to jot down observations, descriptions of people and events, and snippets of conversation while they were still fresh in my mind. At the end of most days, I would expand upon these hastily written notes in the form of more detailed field notes (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). This technique afforded me two advantages. First, I was able to record significant information almost at the moment it presented itself. This prevented me from forgetting what I had observed, or having my memory of those observations clouded by the day’s subsequent events. Second, it enabled me to process and contextualize my observations at the day’s end, a time when I could reflect and work without distraction.

My participants' willingness to share their home life with me afforded me the opportunity to examine such things as language use patterns in the family, transnational artifacts in the home, and personal and official documents such as photographs and report cards. Although this served to triangulate and add depth to what they said about their lives, their parents and their children, I must mention that their kindness, openness, and generosity kept me from being incredibly lonely while I was living in Mexico *sin familia*. They made my transition to life in Mexico a smooth one, offering advice on topics ranging from Telmex {the Mexican phone company} to lighting a propane water heater.

Formal Interviews with Family Members

Since I was interested in the totality of the transnational experience, I also formally interviewed family members of two of the transnational teachers. For the purposes of this study, I will be including the information from only one set of these formal interviews since the second set is made up of the family members of one of the participants I chose not to include. The included family member interview set is composed of my participant Nora's father who lives in Mexico and all four of her siblings. Nora's three brothers and one sister live in the U.S., but also own homes in Mexico. All but one of her siblings come for a visit at least every other month. For the most part, these interviews were a condensed version of the in-depth phenomenological interviews described above. I interviewed each family member at least once. Each of these interviews was audio-taped and lasted approximately two hours. After transcribing these

interviews, I later conducted a short follow-up interview during their next visit in order to clear up any questions I had or explore a particular topic in greater detail.

My decision to formally interview these transnational family members began as one of access and convenience. Nora lived next door to me with her father and her daughter; her siblings' houses were all located on the same block. When these family members were visiting, I also had the opportunity to interact with some of their own children and grandchildren, which adds an additional depth to my understanding of transnationalism. In addition, I informally interviewed the parents and/or siblings of three of the other participants and the spouses of the two married participants if they happened to be around when I was in a given participant's home. These informal interviews were recorded in my field notes.

By living in the setting and interacting with my participants and their families, I was able to develop a more complete picture of transnationalism and the ties that transnationals have on both sides of the border. During my stay in rural Nuevo Leon, it was impossible to ignore the constant movement of people back and forth. In fact, I could tell without looking at a calendar when there was a three day weekend in the U.S. merely by noting the increasing number of vehicles with U.S. license plates. During long vacation periods like Christmas or Easter, the number of vehicles with U.S. plates seemed to outnumber those with Mexican plates. These vehicles did not belong to tourists vacationing in Mexico; the rural area where I conducted my study is not a tourist area. As Nora stated at Christmas time, "Gringo tourists don't come to Lerdo. This isn't Cancún. Those

are people from Lerdo coming back for the holidays.” She then took me to the town plaza for what she called, “Pochos on Parade.” As we sat looking at families gathered in the plaza, she began pointing out who was from here and who was visiting from *el otro lado* {the other side of the border}. I asked her if she knew all these families. She answered, “Of course not, but you can tell just by looking who’s from here and who’s just visiting.” Although I would never develop the same degree of skill that Nora has, she is right: most times it is possible to tell. By expanding my research to include family members of these participants, I got a minute snapshot of those who seem to be perpetually in the process of “going home.” As Nora’s brother Marcelo stated, “When I am over there, I talk about coming home to Lerdo, and when I am here I talk about going home to Greenville.”

Classroom Observations of Transnational Teachers

I visited the primary school classrooms of four of the transnational participants on at least three occasions; I was able to visit the classroom of the participant who returned to U.S. only once. Since teachers working for the SEP’s English in Primary School Program are itinerant teachers, working with sixth graders at several schools, I had the opportunity to visit 25 different public elementary schools in these rural areas. I also visited an extended hours, pilot primary school in which the teacher gives English classes to all grade levels. Since two of the transnational teachers also give English classes at secondary level, I was able to observe at one public *preparatoria técnica* {technical high

school} and one private Catholic *colegio* {elementary/middle school}. In addition, one of the participants gives English classes at satellite campus of the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* {National Pedagogical University} and to employees of two local *maquiladoras* {foreign-owned assembly plants}. I attended each of these participants' classes at least three times in each setting. The focus during all of the observations was on language use, cultural lessons given, and interactions with students, particularly transnational students. I took fieldnotes on all occasions.

Interviews and Participant Observation of SEP officials

I felt it was necessary to interview SEP officials concerning the SEP's English in Primary School Program for two reasons. First, as stated previously, an estimated 95 percent of this program's English teachers in rural areas learned their English in U.S. schools. Without these individuals, there would be no program in rural areas. Second, the bulk of my classroom observations of these transnational teachers took place in public elementary schools as part of the English in Primary School Program. Therefore, I wanted to get a better understanding of the purpose of the program. With this in mind, I examined official documents such as textbooks, orientation manuals, and official descriptions of the program. I conducted two formal interviews with the coordinator of the English in Primary School Program. In the first interview, I focused on the Mexican education system in general. The second dealt more specifically with the English in Primary School Program. Each interview was

approximately one hour in length. I audio-taped these interviews and transcribed them. In addition, I had countless informal conversations with the coordinator and two other SEP officials in this program over the course of my fourteen months in Mexico. I also attended all of the bimonthly training workshops of the program's teachers in Monterrey. I recorded our conversations and my observations in the form of fieldnotes.

Classroom observations of non-transnational teachers

As a result of my interactions with SEP officials and my transnational participants, I felt it was necessary to also observe and informally interview non-transnational teachers of English in the SEP program. The SEP officials I had contact with seemed somewhat critical of transnationals. It is not my intention nor do I feel I have the right to judge who are the better teachers, transnationals or non-transnationals. However, I did find it interesting that SEP officials made a distinction between the transnationals and non-transnationals in the program. Therefore, I was interested in seeing if I could detect any differences in their respective classrooms.

With respect to non-transnational teachers, I relied on a sample of convenience. I had met ten or so non-transnational teachers from Monterrey in Austin during the summer of 2001 when they attended a class for which I was a teaching assistant as part of a month long training course they were sent on by the SEP. When I arrived in Mexico, I sent out E-mails to all of these ten teachers. Three responded and would later open both their homes and classrooms to me.

All three lived and worked in Monterrey and had learned their English as a foreign language in Mexico, rather than in the U.S. I observed the English classes of these three non-transnational English teachers in the SEP program on three separate occasions at five different elementary schools, including one extended hours, pilot primary school. Once again, I focused my observations on language use, cultural lessons given and interactions with students, particularly transnational students.

I am not comfortable about forming any sort of comparison between these non-transnational teachers in an urban area with the rural transnational teachers. First, I spent much more time with my transnational participants. As Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) stated:

The deeper the understanding the researcher gains of the setting and persons in it, the more his or her own constructions will be affected. The naturalistic researcher, realizing this, does not attempt to insulate him or herself from the setting but seeks to establish relationships through which the mutual shaping of constructions is a collaborative exercise in which researcher and respondents voluntarily participate. (p. 26)

There is no doubt that I had a closer relationship with my transnational participants. Clearly, my interactions with transnational teachers colored my observations of non-transnationals.

Second, the urban versus rural issue adds an additional complication. Given the fact that an estimated 95 percent of the SEP program's English teachers in rural Nuevo Leon learned their English in U.S. schools, it is difficult to find program teachers in rural areas who were typical English as a foreign language learners. Although I eventually contacted two such teachers, they did not want to be observed. Both mentioned that they were uncomfortable with the idea because

they said that they could not speak English very well. I was also unable to make contact with an urban teacher who learned English in U.S. schools. The situation is the reverse in Monterrey according to SEP officials: over 95 percent of the SEP program's teachers in Monterrey learned English as a foreign language in Mexico.

Third, I share more commonality with my transnational participants. We have points of reference on both sides of the border and come from working-class backgrounds. This is not the case with the non-transnational teachers. Although they have all traveled to the U.S. to shop or on vacation, none have spent any significant amount of time there. Furthermore, these three non-transnationals are from middle-class backgrounds.

As a result of the above mentioned issues, I simply used the data I obtained from these observations of non-transnationals to explore the issues raised by SEP officials and probe more deeply into their criticisms. For example, several SEP officials frequently complained that transnationals use more Spanish in the classroom than non-transnationals. I did not find this to be the case; both groups use a great deal of Spanish, in part due to the structure of the program. However, transnationals do frequently engage in code-switching, much of it intersentential. In contrast, non-transnationals never seem to do this. Instead, they say several sentences in English and then say the same sentences in Spanish. In other words, they translate rather than code-switch. Armed with these observations, I was able to better question SEP officials about what they meant by "using more Spanish" and found that their criticism is more directed toward code-switching rather than the use of Spanish in the classroom.

RECIPROCITY

My concern regarding reciprocity in research has a long history, most of it arising from personal experience rather than an academic exploration of the issue. In the second grade, I was the object of research conducted by my elementary school principal. I never understood why she wanted to talk to me; I only knew that she pulled me out of art class or recess in order to do so. She would usually give me a butterscotch disk after talking to me; but I was left thinking, “I missed recess for this!” As a teacher, one of my schools was the object of research. The exact nature of this research or whatever became of it, I have no idea: they came, they saw, they left. Seidman (1998) in his discussion of reciprocity involved in the interviewing relationship stated the following: “The reciprocity I can offer in an interview is that which flows from my interest in participants’ experience, my attending to what they say, and my honoring their words when I present their experience to the larger public” (p. 92). I am afraid that is not enough reciprocity for me, especially when I consider what I received while in Mexico.

I am still amazed by the kindness, generosity and openness of those I came into contact with while conducting this study. I felt compelled to help out wherever I could. I went to the American consulate with one of the participants who had initially been told she could not get a U.S. passport despite the fact that she had an official U.S. birth certificate, Social Security number and school records. I taught several classes for a participant who was injured and in fear of losing her job. I tried to track down a birth certificate for another. I helped

another write a formal letter of complaint. Although I would never agree to write the report that SEP officials requested, I helped out with the oral exams of prospective English teachers and pre-service teachers in the English program at the *Normal* {teacher training college} and translated documents into English for various international conferences at which the SEP officials were presenting.

I offered my knowledge of language teaching and learning when asked. Most of my transnational participants are deeply concerned about raising their own children to be bilingual in the context of Mexico, but are often unsure as to whether what they are doing would in fact accomplish that end and have countless questions on the subject. I spent a great deal of time both answering their questions based on my own knowledge and searching for articles, books, and materials which I then passed on to them. Neither the transnational teachers nor the three non-transnational teachers in Monterrey were trained as educators. They are teaching English because they know English. They had a myriad of questions about language teaching and learning which I tried to answer. Although both the transnational and the non-transnational teachers asked me to critique their teaching, I did not feel that I had the right to judge their teaching. Therefore, instead of critiquing their teaching, I taught a couple of lessons in their classrooms while they observed me. I also provided them with ideas for additional activities, downloaded English songs and lyrics from the internet, and gave them copies of educational articles I thought were appropriate.

Did I give as much as I received? No, I did not. However, at least I feel I am able to say, “I came, I saw, I helped, and then I left.” The “I left” part still bothers me.

WORKING WITH THE DATA

Transcription

I transcribed all of the 100 + interview tapes myself. Although I had originally intended to hire someone to help in Mexico, I quickly discarded that idea after completing the first few transcriptions and experiencing a couple of what I like to call “aha” moments while hanging out in my participant’s homes. For example, in one of the first interviews I conducted, Nora briefly mentioned that her kindergarten teacher in the U.S. would always recite nursery rhymes and how much Nora loved them. This tidbit of information took up less than one line of a twenty-five page, single-spaced transcription.

A few days later, the following interaction took place between Nora’s three year old daughter Eva and me.

Eva: Mewy⁶ [mewi], Cántame lil’ lam’ [lilam]. {Mary, Sing little lamb to me.}

Mary: ¿Mande? {What?}

⁶ Nora’s daughter always referred to me using the English pronunciation of my name because her mother always called me “Mary”, not “María” nor the Spanish “Mari”. Like many young English-speaking children, Eva was still not able to produce the “r” sound.

- Eva: Lil' lam. Tú sabes, lil' lam' que va a la eschool [eskul].
Cántamela. {Little lamb. You know, little lamb who goes
to school. Sing it to me.}
- Mary: Pues, ¿Mary had a little lamb, o qué? Is that what you
want? {Well, Mary had a little lamb or what? Is that what
you want?}
- Eva: Sí, lil' lam', lil' lam'. {Yes, little lamb, little lamb.}
- Mary: Okay. Mary had a little lamb...

I did not teach Eva this nursery rhyme, but I would find out much later that her mother often sings her to sleep with nursery rhymes. Eva did not ask Sylvia, a non-transnational neighbor who was also in the room and often takes care of Eva, to sing “little lamb.” Of course, Eva knew Sylvia would not know the rhyme, but she had heard her mother and I speaking English together and made the connection that I would know it. I did not want to miss any of the connections that even a two and a half year old could make. Therefore, by transcribing the interviews myself, I felt that I had a better grasp of both my data and my participants. By extension, I felt I gained a better understanding of the phenomena of transnationalism as it unfolded and continues to unfold in the lives of my participants and the lives of their children.

Translation

One of the most difficult tasks I faced in working with the data dealt with translation issues. A common Spanish phrase in the area, *niños del rancho*, has particular connotations which are not conveyed by the literal English translation “children from the ranch” or even the more figurative “children from the country”. The closest approximation to the meaning of this phrase in English would be something along the lines of “hillbilly children”, which sounds very odd in English despite the fact that it gives a better sense of the original meaning in Spanish. I settled for “children of the rural poor” in this case. In order to preserve the flavor of the local dialect, I opted to reproduce the data in its original language of Spanish and provided an approximate translation which did not sound strange in English.

Similar translation problems arose even when the interviews or interactions took place in English. My participants are bilinguals and their English words often took on local Spanish connotations and vice versa. For example, one of my participants mentioned in English that she does not like teaching at a particular school because some of the children are “very ugly”. In this particular case, the participant does not mean that the children are physically unattractive, as the English connotation of the word would seem to indicate. Instead, she is conveying the local Spanish meaning of a *niño feo* which carries with it the connotation of behaving poorly.

In an effort to clarify such meanings, I constantly double-checked my understanding of key phrases used by participants. All translations from Spanish

to English have also been revised by a Spanish/English bilingual from the area. However, I believe it is important to call attention to the difficulties involved in analyzing and/or translating the words of my bilingual participants.

Data Analysis

The process of analyzing the data was on-going and recursive throughout the data collection phase in the field and beyond. I made researcher comments in my field notes and analytic memos and concept maps after each formal interview. I used a traditional, qualitative, thematic analysis by coding and bracketing interview transcripts and fieldnotes based on an emic perspective rather than pre-existing codes. The words and actions of my participants themselves suggested the codes. As a whole, these codes fell into two different coding categories: definition of situation codes and subjects' ways of thinking about people and objects. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) described these categories of codes as follows:

Definition of the Situation Codes: Under this type of code your aim is to place units of data that tell you how the subjects define the setting or particular topics. You are interested in their world view and how they see themselves in relation to the setting or your topic. What do they hope to accomplish? How do they define what they do? What is important to them?

Subjects' Ways of Thinking About People and Objects: This family of codes gets at the subjects' understandings of each other, of outsiders, and of the objects that make up their world. (p.172-173)

I then grouped the codes into more generic categories. For example, if a participant related a school incident between themselves and *bolillos*⁷ {Anglos}, I first coded the passage via their own term, “*bolillo*” and later grouped like codes under the more generic category of race/ethnicity. Then I would re-examine all the passages placed under a given generic category to see if they indeed were related.

I played around with a various strands of the literature I was familiar with, trying out a variety of possible lenses to view the data. For example, why does this participant painfully describe her transition into Mexican schools? It could be said that she was subjected to subtractive assimilation in U.S. schools, which robbed her of the skills needed to understand the Mexican context. However, she does not describe the schooling process in the U.S. as painful and is adamant that her own daughter attend school in the U.S. Would she tell the same stories if we were sitting in her kitchen in the U.S. rather than in Mexico? As mentioned previously, I was always cognizant of the fact that the literature I was familiar with had been primarily generated in a different context, that of the U.S. The fact that my participants, the children of immigrants to the U.S., are living in Mexico seems to add a dimension uncounted for in the existing literature.

I then made a large chart containing all the participants which listed the categories and the frequency in which they occurred for each participant in order to see which categories appeared to be more or less salient. I tried to look for overarching themes that appeared across all of the participants. I also went back

⁷ A *bolillo* is a type of white bread similar to an individual-sized French baguette. The term is frequently used by both Mexicans and Mexican Americans to refer to Anglos.

through my fieldnotes relating these themes to what I had observed in their homes and classrooms. At this point, I was tempted to throw everything in box. I felt that I could never do justice to their lives and their stories because what they had to say and what I observed did not seem to fit neatly into the theoretical frameworks I was familiar with. Why couldn't they all have just said that they hated the U.S. and talked in glowing terms of *México lindo y querido*⁸ or even vice versa? That I could understand; that I could explain with neat headings and subheadings in two hundred pages or less. But this was so messy, so contradictory.

There seemed to be a million stories to tell and a hundred ways to tell them. I went back to the literature searching for ways to explain what I heard and saw during my fourteen months in Mexico. I devised a loose theoretical framework of analysis based on the following strands in the literature: transnationalism, cultural capital, and borderlands epistemologies. The literature on transnationalism relates to my participants' life histories and that of cultural capital relates to their current situation in Mexico. Borderlands epistemologies provide an overarching lens for understanding the data of this study.

⁸ *México lindo y querido* is a Mexican folk song popularized by Jorge Negrete and well-known on both sides of the border. The chorus of this song is as follows: *México lindo y querido, si muero lejos de ti. Digan que estoy dormido y que me traigan aquí.* {Beautiful and beloved Mexico, if I die far from you, say that I am sleeping and that they bring me here.} Obviously, it has special meaning for Mexicans living in the U.S.

THE RESEARCHER'S BAGGAGE

In qualitative research, the primary instrument used to both collect and analyze the data is researcher. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985),

...only the human instrument is capable of grasping and evaluating the meaning of that differential interaction; because the intrusion of instruments intervenes in the mutual shaping of other elements and that shaping can be appreciated and evaluated only by a human; and because all instruments are value-based and interact with local values but only the human is in a position to identify and take into account (to some extent) those resulting biases. (p. 39-40)

Rather than fear the subjectivity and bias of the human instrument, qualitative researchers believe that objectivity in a scientific sense does not exist. As Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) asserted:

The realization that objectivity in research is an illusion frees the naturalistic researcher to do truly effective data collection and analysis. Most important is the fact that the researcher him- or herself becomes the most significant instrument for data collection and analysis. Addition of the human computer (an instrument unsurpassed for the flexible acquisition and analysis of diverse and simultaneous data) to the researcher's inventory of tools provides advantages that outweigh the supposed disadvantages, even if the case for objectivity in research could be sustained. (p. 39)

They described that the process of collecting and analyzing data is an "interactive" one much in the same way that "humans solve their daily problems" (p.39). In other words, researcher is both immersed in the data and in the phenomenon from which the data is arising.

Yet at the same time, it must be noted that because the researcher is the instrument of data collection and analysis: "All observations and analyses are filtered through that human being's worldview, values and perspective"

(Merriam, 1998, p. 22). Therefore, it is important that those reading this study understand my baggage and the way that I believe my participants saw me. Both undoubtedly influenced the data gathering and its ongoing and recursive analysis.

I am a middle-aged, former high school Spanish teacher, English dominant Spanish/English bilingual, half White, half Mexican American; product of very socially responsible,⁹ Catholic, working-class parents, who has struggled with identity and class issues. I like to think that my personal struggles have been somewhat laid to rest, calmed first by the party girl haze of my high school years to my later failed attempt to attend an private university via an affirmative action scholarship to my subsequent years of travel, circling the globe working whenever I could picking a variety of crops, cleaning motel rooms, and bartending, among other things. When I finally decided to make another attempt at college, I had only one goal in mind: to learn to speak Spanish well. I cannot say that I had consciously decided why this goal was important to me, I just knew that it was something I wanted to do. In the process of reaching this goal, I became a high school Spanish teacher because of my father's very working-class words of wisdom. "Who's going to pay you just because you know Spanish?" he asked, "Better you should be a teacher or something."

So I became a Spanish teacher, first on the Navajo reservation in New Mexico and later in rural Arizona where the student body was overwhelmingly Mexican/Mexican American and low income. I feel I have a great deal of

⁹ My parents despite limited resources always managed to share what they had with those they saw as less fortunate. An endless parade of relatives and friends of theirs or my sisters or mine lived in our home off and on throughout my youth up to the present day. My sisters and I jokingly refer to this practice as "taking in strays."

experience teaching working-class, minority youth in overcrowded, under-funded schools, but know very little about teaching White, middle class youth in schools where I assume the paper supply does not run out in January, and the dropout rate can be measured in single digits. I like to think I was a successful teacher even if I sometimes measured my success via comments made by former students like high school “dropout” Luis V., “Maestra, nomás quiero que sepas {Teacher, I just want you to know}, I skipped your class less than any of my other classes.”

As a graduate student, I gravitated towards qualitative research because I knew what the quantitative measures I was familiar with as a teacher have said about my students: low-performing, high drop out rates, limited English proficiency, low socio-economic status, and so forth. I became quite familiar with the literature on assimilation, immigrant education, Latino cultural identity and achievement, and critical theory. Before embarking on this study, I read what little I could find on the Mexican education system and explored the newly emerging literature on transnationalism.

I was aware that the bulk of what I had studied dealt specifically with immigrant populations living in the U.S. or Europe. In other words, I felt I knew quite a bit about the schooling and life experiences of immigrants within the context of the U.S., but very little about these same immigrants and/or their children when they returned to Mexico. I entered into the study with the belief that the context of Mexico would make a difference. Therefore, I tried at all times to keep an open mind and listen to what my participants were saying, rather than wondering how I could fit what they said into existing frameworks with which I

was already familiar. However, I am under no illusion that the above mentioned personal and academic baggage did not influence the way I both collected and interpreted the data.

The way I was viewed by my transnational participants in the context of Mexico is also important with respect to the data. They knew that I was born, educated, and lived most of my life in the U.S., but that I had attended university for a time in Mexico and that I had grandparents who had immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico. They knew that I was a former high school teacher and a doctoral student interested in language teaching and Mexican/Mexican American education issues. On the one hand, I was an insider because I spoke both Spanish and English, frequently code-switched, and shared some bicultural points of reference with my participants. On the other hand, my Spanish did not exactly sound like theirs, I had more formal education, and my experience living in Mexico was limited.

A professor of mine suggested that I gained access to my participants so quickly because I always present myself as working-class. Truthfully, I had never really thought about it that way or at least I was not conscious of the fact that I may seem that way to others. He went further since he already knew about the house I rented being basically a cinderblock box with a cement floor and running water. He asked me if Nora, who was familiar with life on both sides of the border, would have offered that same house to him or even to a Mexican who came off as middle-class, mentioning a few names. I quickly replied without thinking, “No of course not. You guys have higher standards.” I was still

bothered by the fact that I was answering for Nora. So, I called her and asked her why she offered me the house and if she would have offered that same house to Elsa, a mutual acquaintance who was a middle-class Mexican. She quickly answered, “Get real. As if Elsa would live in that house. But you, I guess I just figured you wouldn’t mind.” So perhaps, I do come off as a working-class, graduate student even though that seems like an oxymoron to me.

I have provided the above information about myself in order to make clear “the researcher’s assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 205). In keeping with the principles of qualitative research, I have made an effort to enhance the internal validity of the study by using multiple data sources, member checks, prolonged engagement in the setting, and peer debriefing (Merriam, 1998, p. 204-205)

CHAPTER 4: BACKGROUND ON PLACES AND PEOPLE

¡Pobre México! Tan lejos de Dios, tan cerca de los Estados Unidos.

Porfirio Díaz

As a Spanish teacher, I always began my first class by asking students to name the current president of Mexico. Without counting Mexican immigrant students and the one or two Mexican American students in-the-know, I generally did not receive an answer. Despite the fact that the U.S. and Mexico share a two thousand mile border, many Americans know very little about Mexico other than to say it has pyramids, nice beaches, brightly colored handicrafts and lots of women with babies begging for spare change, all of which can be seen on any vacation package tour. However, rural Nuevo Leon, where I spent fourteen months, generally does not appear on any colorful tourist brochure, nor are my participants engaged in the business of producing and selling trinkets for tourists. With this in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to contextualize this study by providing significant background information on both the setting and the participants.

This chapter is organized into four sections. In the first section, I provide an overview of the state of Nuevo Leon and the rural areas in which my participants live. In the second section I describe the social class structure as it exists in Mexico and how this structure plays out in these rural areas. At the same

time, I situate my participants and their families within the social class structure. Next, I give an overview of basic information concerning the general structure of the education system in Mexico focusing on the information I obtained through my interactions with my participants and education officials, as well as what this structure looks like on the ground level in the schools I visited. In the final section, I introduce the participants who opened their homes and shared their lives with me.

THE SETTING

Nuevo Leon is located in northeastern Mexico. It is officially a border state, but the actual border with Texas is only about ten miles wide. There is some variation in climate, although hot and dry weather predominates. The Sierra Madre Oriental mountain range crosses the state diagonally from southeast to northwest. The only agricultural product of great importance is citrus; in 1998, Nuevo Leon ranked fourth in the nation in the production of oranges and second in that of tangerines (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, 1997). Cattle ranching is also important since much of the land is only suitable for grazing. As is typical of northern Mexican states, large landowners for the most part “control extensive ranches or export-oriented fruit, vegetable and grain holdings” (Canak & Swanson, 1998, p. 59); however, overall, the state is known for its industrial production rather than its agricultural sector.

According to officials of the Secretaría de Educación Pública {SEP- Secretary of Public Education} of Nuevo Leon, there are no Amerindian peoples

native to Nuevo Leon remaining because the local indigenous population had long since been run off, annihilated or absorbed into the mestizo Spanish speaking population. Less than half of one percent of the total population speaks an indigenous language (Méndez, 2000, p. 1). This is due to the fact that Amerindian peoples have been migrating to the state in recent years from other areas of Mexico in search of work, but these peoples are concentrated in the Monterrey metropolitan area.

Surrounded by mountains, including the famous Cerro de la Silla, Monterrey is the capital of Nuevo Leon. It is the second largest industrial center in Mexico and the third largest city in terms of population. Approximately three million people, representing 83 percent of the population of the entire state, is concentrated in the Monterrey metropolitan area (Instituto Nacional de Administración Pública, 1997). Like Mexico City, the population of Monterrey has grown considerably in recent years as people from rural Nuevo Leon and other states have flocked there in search of work and a higher standard of living. Monterrey is also home to the *Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey* {Instituto of Technology and Superior Studies of Monterrey}. Founded in 1943 by a group of Monterrey industrialists and modeled after the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the *Tec* attracts students from all over the world, especially Latin America. I attended the *Tec* for a year in the 1980's, choosing this university over others in Mexico because its reputation made it relatively easy to transfer credits back to the U.S.

Despite lack of natural resources and a shortage of water, Nuevo Leon is not considered a poor state in Mexico. I was constantly reminded of this fact by non-transnational residents of Nuevo Leon, who were for the most part middle class, and who had traveled to or worked in other areas in Mexico¹⁰. They asserted that this state was different than the rest of Mexico. It is more developed, not as poor, and that the real problem is stranglehold of the highly centralized federal government in Mexico City and the number of poor people flooding in from other states. The following passage is taken from the introduction of a public *preparatoria* {high school} textbook dealing with the history of Nuevo Leon:

Nuevo Leon es una de las entidades más desarrollados de la República mexicana (con 3.9 % de la población del país, ocupaba 6.5 % del PIB nacional en 1993 y era el más urbanizado, aproximándose al nivel observado en los países más desarrollados). Su gente se ha caracterizado, desde la época colonial, por su independencia, vanguardismo económico y gran capacidad emprendedora, en un ambiente hostil. (Méndez, 2000, p. 11) { Nuevo Leon is one of the most developed entities of the Mexican Republic (with 3.9 % of the population of the country, it occupied 6.5 % of the gross domestic product in 1993, and was the most urbanized, coming close to the level observed in more developed countries.) Its people have been characterized, since the colonial period, by their independence, economic vanguardism and great resourcefulness, in a hostile environment. }

To be fair, both the textbook and the aforementioned natives of Nuevo Leon are right in a sense. I have traveled extensively in Mexico and many things

¹⁰ As a whole, my transnational participants had traveled very little in Mexico and therefore, may have been unaware of the conditions in other states. Any vacations or trips they took tended to be to the U.S. to visit relatives. None had worked anywhere in Mexico, but their parents' place of origin, asserting that if they had to leave the area in order to find work, they would go to the U.S. rather than elsewhere in Mexico.

do tend to be better in Nuevo Leon, relatively speaking. The major roads are well-maintained in relation to the rest of Mexico; the electricity, water, and telephone systems are fairly dependable. However, it is still a state of stark contrasts between the haves and the have-nots.

Lerdo, Turco, Montemayor, and Rancho del Valle are all located south of Monterrey. As a whole, it is an area of Mexico very few foreign and not many domestic tourists see. If tourists come to Nuevo Leon at all, they go to Monterrey. There isn't much to see in these rural areas, any more than there is in many small rural towns in the U.S. Life is quiet, and everyone seems to know everyone else. There is little crime, and although there is great deal of poverty, there are no beggars. Despite the absence of foreign tourists, *casas de cambio* {foreign currency exchange houses} abound. They accept only dollars and exist to serve the needs the transnationals who are in town or who have sent money back.

According to local residents, Turco and Rancho del Valle have diminished in population with many residents leaving to search for work in Monterrey, larger towns in the area or the U.S. Some area residents refer to Turco a *pueblo de fantasmas* {ghost town} with many houses standing vacant for most of the year because their owners work in the U.S. Others call it a town of *viejitos y niños* {old people and children}, since those of working age leave in order to earn a living. Rancho del Valle is much smaller than Turco. There is an elementary school and a couple shops, but these shops are not shops by any conventional definition. They are more like homes where people sell a bare minimum of basic

necessities and a few luxury items like cookies or candy, so that people living there do not have to travel ten miles into a large town every time they need something.

Lerdo and Montemayor have grown larger in population and are home to several *maquiladoras*¹¹ {foreign owned assembly plants} and food processing plants. As one resident stated, “Vienen de la sierra y de los ranchitos para vivir aquí porque ya no se aguantan allá.” {They come down from the mountains and from the *ranchitos*¹² to live here because they can’t take it anymore there.} Yet despite a growth in population and industry, Lerdo and Montemayor retain their small town, rural flavor. There is little “nightlife” to speak of, unless one counts the number of people who pull rocking chairs into the street in order to chat with the neighbors or those passing by.

Before the militarization of the border, the U.S. had served as a sort of safety valve for the poor of these areas. In times of severe economic stress or when one needed money for anything, it was relatively easy to pick up itinerant farm work during harvest time in South Texas. The border was patrolled, but those doing the patrolling often looked the other way when there were crops to be picked. Don José, the father of one of my participants who is almost eighty years

¹¹ Maquiladoras are foreign owned assembly plants. Corporations, many of them U.S., import materials and machinery without paying any duty and export the finished product to other parts of the world. This increases corporate profitability because they are able to take advantage of low cost labor in Mexico.

¹² There is really no adequate English translation of “rancho” or “ranchito”. It generally refers to a very isolated cluster of homesteads where residents survive on what they produce through subsistence agriculture. In some cases, the residents are ejiditarios. Ejidos are communal land holdings; many were established to provide land to landless peasants as part of agrarian reform after the Mexican Revolution.

old, began going to the U.S. off and on with his wife beginning in his early twenties.

Don José: Pasábanos de mojados. En lanchas. Había vigilancia y todo eso, pero así, la labor que hay quien levantar. Toda la gente iba sin papeles, la uva, la fresa, el algodón, tomate, chile, todo eso, pues, todo eso sembraban allá, toda esa gente, a eso íbanos a pizar algodón y todo eso. Y el mismo gobierno estaba de acuerdo de dejarnos pasar. Cuando ya miraba que ya se acababa la, todo, la fruta y todo, entonces ellos mismos, los patrones mismos, avisaron a la migración por aventar uno para acá. {We went over as wetbacks. In boats. There was border patrol and all that, but so, the work, someone had to harvest. Everybody went without papers, grapes, strawberries, cotton, tomatoes, chiles, and all that, well, all that they planted over there, everybody, for that we went to pick cotton and all that. And the same government agreed to let us pass. When it was looking like everything was ending, the fruit and all, they themselves, the same growers advised the Immigration and Naturalization Service to throw everyone back here.}

Crossing the border is no longer an easy task. (I have been in line for over three hours waiting to drive into the U.S at a border checkpoint). For the undocumented, it costs more than time. My neighbor Leti paid a *coyote*¹³ {smuggler} \$2,000 U.S. dollars, sent by her son in Houston to get his wife over. It would be the first time in three years that this husband and wife were together. Luckily, she made it unharmed.

¹³ A *coyote* is someone who is in the business of transporting human beings without documentation across the border. I do not know if this fee is standard, but it seemed to be the going rate in Lerdo where I was living.

SOCIAL CLASS

It is estimated that the upper class in Mexico represents between five and six percent of the total population (Canak & Swanson, 1998, p. 58). In rural areas, this upper class is associated with large landholdings, rather than being tied to manufacturing and commercial interests. However, I did not see much of this upper class in the rural areas where I conducted my research. Overt displays of wealth like the huge, mansion-style homes on wide, tree lined boulevards like those found in affluent suburban areas of Monterrey such as Garza García or San Pedro are largely absent. Furthermore, these rural areas do not have trendy clubs, restaurants, or malls where the upper and upper middle classes tend to congregate. On my first visit to Lerdo, however, one of my participants did take me to see *el Casino*, an elite “old money,” social club formed well over a hundred years ago. She took great pleasure in pointing out the names of those who had little left of their former wealth, but their elite *apellidos* {last names}.

In general, the middle class in Mexico is made up of white collar workers in the private and public sector, professionals and small business owners and managers. It represents one-quarter to one-third of the population (Canak & Swanson, 1998, p. 60). Middle-class incomes have dropped since 1982 (p. 61). The middle classes were particularly hard hit in the 1980’s and 1990’s, when devaluation of the peso wiped out life-savings. Although the peso has been relatively stable in recent years, credit is still difficult to obtain and interest rates

are staggering. In rural areas, there is also a limit to the number of professionals the local rural economy can support. Several of my neighbors in Lerdo have husbands, who are engineers, lawyers, and so forth, who have to live and work in Monterrey during the week, returning home only on the weekends.

My participants and their families would currently fall into the category of the middle class, based on standard of living. They have spacious, well-equipped homes, one or more vehicles in good condition, and “respectable non-manual labor” teaching jobs.¹⁴ However, they differ from the bulk of the middle class in several respects. First, they were relatively unaffected by the aforementioned economic crises because they and/or their parents were earning dollars at the time in the U.S. Also, any savings they had were in dollars rather than pesos and kept in U.S. banks or in their homes. Therefore, while the rest of the Mexican middle class was forced to tighten their belts, this group tended to invest their dollars in Mexico by buying property, constructing and improving their own homes, and constructing rental housing. Second, these participants and their families tend to avoid the conspicuous consumption patterns which seem typical of both upper and middle class Mexicans. I would characterize them as cautious and savvy consumers. I was constantly amazed by their consumer skill. They know exactly what products to buy in Mexico, what to buy in the U.S., what could be bought used or broken in the U.S. and refurbished cheaply in Mexico, and so forth. None employ *señoras* {domestic help} in their homes, although they could afford to do so. They do not throw particularly lavish parties, and I got the sense that they are

¹⁴ Their relatives in the U.S. are engaged in manual labor.

not even attempting to “keep up with the Joneses”. Third, while they have far exceeded the education level of their parents, none has a university degree to date. Finally, my participants tend to view the Mexican middle class with a certain degree of disdain, making frequent reference to members of this class as “corrupt,” “lazy,” “showy,” and “wasteful”.

The working class is by far the largest class in Mexico, although there are a variety of levels. In general, life in urban areas provides greater access to resources and opportunity than rural Mexico, “where government social programs are only a rumor” (Canak & Swanson, 1998, p. 65). Poverty may be more visible in major cities due to the presence of huge shanty towns surrounding these cities and the ubiquitous beggars, traffic median sellers and windshield washers. However, poverty in rural areas tends to be more severe, albeit less visible. “Infant mortality, unemployment and poverty are all substantially higher in Mexico’s rural areas....By 1989, more than 25 percent of rural children were malnourished, double the rate of just one decade earlier” (p. 66).

Conditions in rural Nuevo Leon tend to be less severe than central and southern states. The poor living in and around Lerdo and Montemayor have greater access to social services like public health care facilities and subsidized food programs than do those in Turco and Rancho del Valle. Rancho del Valle is by far the most economically deprived area of the four. It is important to note, however, that although free public health care is available in Lerdo and Montemayor, my participants stated that anyone with any money either buys into a state insurance type plan which offers a much better quality of care than free

services or pays for care in the private sector. Furthermore, while the consultation is provided at no charge by these public health services, medicines, bandages, and so forth have to be purchased.

Like many parts of both urban and rural Mexico, inadequate and overcrowded housing is a problem for the vast majority of the working class and even lower middle class in these rural areas. To illustrate this housing crunch, a family of seven moved into the tiny, one bedroom cement block home with a poured concrete floor I vacated in Lerdo. This family is not destitute, however, since they could pay the approximately \$100 U.S. dollars a month rent. Homes like this one are also rented “as is.” There are no kitchen cabinets, no refrigerator and stove, no water heater, no propane tank, no heating/cooling system, nor any closets. If the plumbing backs up, the renter, rather than the owner, contracts and pays for repairs. The renter also pays all utilities.

Nolasco and Acevedo (1985), in their discussion of social strata in the border cities of Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana, made a distinction between *marginados*, the underemployed or occasionally employed, and the *trabajadores pobres*, those who are poor, but have stable jobs. While the area that I conducted my research is more rural than the urban border areas described by the aforementioned researchers, based on my observations of the area these distinctions hold true for these areas of Nuevo Leon. Before immigrating to the U.S., the parents of my participants would have fallen into the working class category of *marginados*. In one way or another, all participants described their parents as manual laborers who immigrated because of lack of steady

employment. None of their parents had access to employment in the formal economy, nor employment connected to labor unions which often provide “much greater job security and fringe benefits, including subsidized housing and pensions” (Canak & Swanson, 1998, p. 61). Furthermore, all participants attribute their families’ rise in social class to immigration. While watching a Monterrey based talk show on television in which a guest suggested that Mexicans should stay and help develop Mexico rather than immigrate to the U.S., one participant scoffed, “Yeah right, if my parents had stayed in Mexico the only thing that would have developed would have been our hunger.”

SCHOOLING IN MEXICO

I believe it is important to describe in some detail generalities about the Mexican education system for two reasons. First, little is known about Mexican schools within the education community in the U.S., despite the large numbers of Mexican transfer students enrolled in U.S. schools today. In my own field of second language education, I have read a great deal about Canadian schools and how second languages are taught there. Yet, as a high school teacher, I have never had a Canadian transfer student. My Mexican transfer students were too numerous to count. Second, my participants have attended schools on both sides of the border and are currently employed as teachers in Mexico. While readers may be familiar with the basic workings of schools in the U.S., many of the comments my participants made would be incomprehensible without a basic understanding of schools on the Mexican side of the border. The information I

present in this section has been gleaned from several sources: discussions with education officials in Nuevo Leon, official documents and websites of education agencies in Mexico and Nuevo Leon, basic resources concerning education in Mexico available in the U.S., observations in Mexican schools, and lengthy discussions with my participants. With respect to these participants, it is important to note that most view schools in Mexico with “trifocals”. They know about the public schools they attended in the U.S. They know about the schools they *would* have attended in Mexico if their parents had not immigrated and they know about the schools that they *did* attend in Mexico as a result of the increased economic resources which immigration brought to their parents.

There are four basic levels of public education in Nuevo Leon, not including university: preschool, elementary school, secondary school and preparatory school. Preschool education is of two different types: *educación inicial* for children up to age four and *educación preescolar* for children age four to six. This second type is often referred to at least by the general population by the more common term “*el kinder.*” In contrast to U.S. kindergarten, there is more than one level to *el kinder* and therefore, children in Mexico are in *el kinder* for more than one year. Elementary school, *la primaria*, encompasses grades one through six. Secondary school, *la secundaria*, refers to three years of education past *primaria* roughly, corresponding at least by age group to seventh, eighth, and ninth grade in the U.S. Preparatory school or *la prepa* may be either two or three years depending on the type of *prepa*. Throughout this study, I usually refer to the Mexican schools my participants attended or are employed at via the Spanish

term in order to avoid confusion and having to constantly repeat “Mexican” or “Mexico”.

Education is compulsory in Mexico from age six to fifteen. While this used to mean only elementary grades one through six, it was been expanded to include the three years of *secundaria* during the presidency of Ernesto Zedillo. However, there appears to be little enforcement of mandatory attendance even at the primary school level. In Mexico as a whole, 75.6 percent of children enroll in *primaria*, 40.1 percent enroll in *secundaria*, and 21.3 percent enroll in *prepa* (Canak & Swanson, 1998, p. 130). In general, the level of schooling tends to be higher in Nuevo Leon than other Mexican states. According to the statistics posted on the website of the Secretaría de Educación de Nuevo Leon (2003), the national rate of illiteracy in 2000-2001 was 9.4%, while Nuevo Leon’s was only 3.2%. The rate of desertion of *primaria* students in Nuevo Leon was a scant .9%, while the national average was 1.8%. The average number of years of schooling per student was 8.9 in the Nuevo Leon versus 7.6 nation-wide.

Educación preescolar has expanded in recent years, although it is difficult for many of the working poor to send their children because, according to my participants, parents are expected to provide the bulk of supplies for activities and school maintenance. One of my participants, Nora, pays approximately \$20 U.S. dollars per month for the public preschool her daughter attends. According to SEP officials, *educación preescolar* is also not available in many areas and tends to be underfunded where it is available because it does not yet fall within the realm of compulsory education in Mexico.

The *primaria* has a national standardized curriculum. Textbooks are provided free of charge to children and are theirs to keep. These textbooks are published by the Secretaría de Educación Pública and resemble workbooks.¹⁵ There are state and federal *primarias*, but every child in every public *primaria* in Mexico receives these same texts and follows the same national curriculum, although in recent years individual states have been permitted to add to the national curriculum as part of movement toward decentralization. Since English classes are not part of the core curriculum, the materials used vary from state to state.

In general, the regular *primaria* teacher is a *maestro de planta* or a full time, tenured-like teacher with membership in a national teachers union. Most *primarias* I visited are in effect two *primarias* with a different name and uniform¹⁶ that share the same building at different times of the day. One set of children attends in the morning, *el turno matutino* from 8:00 am to 12:30 pm. In the afternoon, during *el turno vespertino* from 1:00 pm to 5:30 pm, a second set of children, teachers, and administrators utilize the same classrooms. Therefore, the school day for most children in the *primarias* I visited is only four hours long, factoring out the time devoted to morning line-up, recess, and after recess line-up. Recently, there has been a move to lengthen the school day in Nuevo Leon via pilot schools, *escuelas pilotas*, in which the same children attend school from 8:00

¹⁵ The national *primaria* textbooks can be viewed online at the following website: <http://www.sep.gob.mx/wb/distribuidor.jsp?3866>.

¹⁶ All *primarias* I visited have uniforms. However, in some of the poorest schools, uniform rules are not enforced because parents are unable to purchase uniforms for their children.

am to noon and 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm.¹⁷ I visited two pilot schools, one in Monterrey and one in Montemayor. However, according to SEP officials, there is a shortage of actual school buildings in Nuevo Leon, so this extended schedule has little chance of becoming the norm until more schools are constructed.

The *primarias* I visited have the same basic structure: cement block classrooms encircling a paved courtyard area. There is usually no playground equipment or heating and cooling system in the classrooms. Each classroom is equipped with a teacher's desk, student desks, and a blackboard. There is often a locked cabinet with two doors in which teachers from each *turno* can secure their supplies. Students carry all books and supplies with them each day. Class size seems to vary greatly from school to school and grade to grade, ranging from fifteen to thirty or more. There is also a great deal of variation in the physical plant depending upon the income level of the parents. Although the *primaria* is free, according to my participants, the parents' association or *Padres de Familia* is expected provide any extras. For example, in one school I visited, the *Padres de Familia* from the morning session had installed swamp coolers in the classrooms which are controlled by switches in the administration office of the morning session. Those in the afternoon session, despite the often insufferable heat of the afternoon, cannot make use of these swamp coolers since the *Padres de Familia* of this session are poorer and neither had helped with installation costs nor could pay higher electricity costs. This dependence on *Padres de Familia* seems to affect all aspects of the schools I visited. The schools which serve the

¹⁷ The two hour lunch period reflects the fact that traditionally the afternoon meal is the main meal in Mexico.

poorest children often have broken and insufficient numbers of desks, broken windows, unreliable plumbing, peeling paint, unusable blackboards, and a poor level of cleanliness.

In general, the children in the afternoon sessions appear to fare the worst and are most often poorer than the children in the morning sessions. Martín (1994) described a similar situation with respect to *primarias* in Guadalajara. Education officials I spoke with in Nuevo Leon also mentioned that the afternoon session is problematic. Due to falling real wages, most regular teachers are forced into the situation of being *maestros de planta* at different schools during the morning and afternoon sessions in order to support their families. Even several of the morning session principals I met work the afternoon session as teachers at a different school or vice versa. Therefore, with only a scant half hour between *turnos*, it seems the employees have little time to eat or recoup energy levels. According to my participants, parents with even slightly higher levels of economic resources and connections fight to get their children into the morning session, which means the children who need the most end up with the least in the afternoon session.

In more isolated rural areas like Rancho del Valle, there is only a morning session. This means it difficult to keep teachers because they are unable to pick up a second session, nor are there any other forms of employment available. Furthermore, the system is highly centralized and all teacher placements are made by officials in Monterrey. Beginning teachers accustomed to more urban areas are often sent to places like Rancho del Valle, where they really do not want to be

in the first place. Education officials mentioned that both of these factors contribute to a difficulty in staffing and a high turnover rate at more isolated rural schools.

In areas like Lerdo and Montemayor, where there are numerous *primarias* to choose from, children do not necessarily attend the *primaria* closest to their home. However, it seems to work out that way for poor children. More affluent parents, like my participant Laura, use their resources to get their children into one of the best *primarias* even if that *primaria* is located some distance from their home. According to my participants, it is necessary to have political or social *palancas* {connections} in order to get one's children into the most respected public *primarias*.

English as a subject in *primaria* is a relatively new phenomenon in Nuevo Leon that plays in one of two ways in the areas I visited. *Padres de Familia* may arrange for someone to teach English a few days a week to their children during the regular school day with each child paying a set fee per month. If a particular child cannot pay, he or she does not attend the English class. The second way is via the English in Primary School Program developed by the Secretaría of Educación Pública of Nuevo Leon. The English teacher in both cases is an itinerant teacher who works at several schools. It is not a union job like that of regular *primaria* teachers. Instead, English teachers are paid per class and are not subject to the same licensing requirements as *primaria* teachers. English classes are conducted within the hours of a regular school *turno*.

Secundarias in the areas I visited usually either focus on preparing student for *prepa* or vocational training. Most run two sessions like in *primarias*. Although *secundarias* are much larger than *primarias*, according to my participants they do not have the same level of depersonalization that is characteristic of U.S. middle and high schools. Students are organized into cohorts and stay for the most part in the same room with the same group of 30-40 students while the teachers rotate from room to room. While there is no single set of textbooks as in *primarias*, the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* maintains a list of authorized textbooks from which public *secundarias* may select.

Public *secundarias* in these areas no longer charge a tuition fee. However, there are many hidden costs. Uniform requirements are more stringently enforced. Thus, if a family is unable to purchase the required uniform, the child will be unable to attend. Textbooks are not free, although there is usually a classroom set. According to my participants, what plays out in practice is that students are expected to purchase photocopies of the texts. There are also additional fees like lab costs. Therefore, although *secundaria* is now compulsory, it remains out of reach for many poor families. Furthermore, the many isolated rural areas like Rancho del Valle do not have a *secundaria*. Students wishing to attend *secundaria* in such rural areas must either travel daily (if the distance is not too great) or board in towns where *secundarias* are located. Strides have been made to improve access to *secundaria* in more isolated rural areas in Nuevo Leon via the creation of *telesecundarias*, where classes are taught via television.

English is a required course at all three levels in an academic *secundaria*. I know the least about *secundarias* because none of my participants taught there. In contrast to *primarias*, English teachers tend to be *maestros de planta* rather itinerant teachers. This means they are contracted in much the same way as teachers in the U.S. are contracted for a full school day at one school. According to education officials, in order become a teacher at *secundaria*, one must have first graduated from the *Normal Básica* {elementary level teacher training school} and be certified to teach *primaria* before going on to the *Normal Superior* {secondary level teacher training school} in order to specialize in a particular subject and gain certification to teach *secundaria*, although this is changing. Like regular teachers at *primaria*, positions at *secundaria* are union jobs and subject to licensing requirements.

Adult “GED” type programs are available in some of these rural areas for those over the age of fifteen who have not completed *primaria* or *secundaria*. At the *primaria* level, this consists basically of purchasing and studying a set of textbooks and taking an exam. Upon passing the exam, an individual is awarded a diploma from *primaria*. At the *secundaria* level, an individual must attend classes (usually late in the evening), but three years of *secundaria* are usually collapsed into two. An exit exam is required to obtain a diploma from *secundaria*. Unfortunately, in recent years it appears that adult education programs have been subject to increasing budget cuts and are no longer available in many areas (Canak & Swanson, 1998, p. 132). In this study, I refer to this adult education as GED *primaria* and GED *secundaria*.

Prepas are not part of compulsory education in Nuevo Leon. Therefore, tuition and fees appear to vary greatly, as does the program. Some require entrance exams. Education reformers, like the founder of the *prepa* where one participant works, have pushed for the creation of *prepas* which use multiple criteria for admission, because the exams tend to favor more affluent, urban children of parents with higher education levels. *Prepas* are either two or three years long. Students who graduate from *prepas* have their *bachillerato* which is not the same as a B.A. in the U.S. Public *prepas* may be affiliated with a public university with the assumption being if one attends that *prepa* one will also attend the affiliate university. All *prepa* students must purchase their textbooks. Some *prepas* focus on academic subjects in order to prepare students to attend university. Others focus on academics plus a vocational component, such as accounting or computing. English is a required subject. However, the sequence can vary from one to three years, and three years is increasingly becoming the norm according to my participants and education officials. Like *secundarias*, students remain with a specific cohort of 40 plus students, and the teachers rotate out. This lends itself to the development of a great sense of camaraderie within cohorts because students have all classes with the same group of students.

Many *prepa* teachers are contracted by number of hours. The number of hours one works will determine eligibility in health insurance plans, *aguinaldos* {Christmas bonuses}, and vacation pay. At the *prepas* I visited, *prepa* teachers are often *licenciados* or *ingenieros*, those who have a university degree and have

completed a senior thesis¹⁸ as part of their undergraduate study in a given field. Due to lack of employment opportunities for professionals in rural areas, it is not unusual for someone who has a degree in a field such as law or business administration to be teaching in *prepas*. There are no *prepas* in Turco or Rancho del Valle. Like *secundaria* students, *prepa* students from isolated rural areas usually travel daily if distances permit or board during the week in the town where a *prepa* is located. There are also GED *prepa* programs for adults, however, many tend to be private.

In Lerdo and Montemayor, there are several private schools to choose from. Some are for older students and specialize in a particular field like computing or business and secretarial fields. In the realm of basic education, *colegios* are the most common and are usually run by either Protestant or Catholic organizations and include *preescolar*, *primaria* and *secundaria*. According to my participants, parents do not necessarily need connections to get their children into these *colegios*, but they do need money. Private *prepas* are sometimes affiliated with private universities, and it is taken as a given that if one goes to that *prepa* one will attend its university affiliate. Tuition alone at any private school is well beyond the reach of most working class and lower middle class Mexicans.

The number of English/Spanish bilingual institutes, both religious and secular, has exploded in Monterrey (Grimaldo, 2001), and some have sprouted in Lerdo and Montemayor as well. Tuition alone in the 2002-2003 school year at a newly opened bilingual institute in Montemayor was approximately \$1,000 U.S.

¹⁸ Those who graduate university without doing a senior thesis are called *egresados*. I have never met an *egresado*, but have met lots of *licenciados*.

dollars per child per semester. The textbooks in English had been imported directly from the U.S. In response to this growth in bilingual instruction, well-established private *colegios* have expanded the number of hours devoted to English instruction. English, like French during the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, is very much seen as cultural capital for affluent Mexicans, and they are willing to pay a great deal to insure that their children possess this cultural capital (Grimaldo, 2001). What is interesting, however, is that the most proficient persons in English I met were my participants, the children of working class parents who immigrated to the U.S. These participants are well aware of the contradiction.

Nora: I know it bothers los ricos {the rich} here in Mexico that I didn't have to pay out money to get my English like they do. Like Licenciada Gaby who has all this education in fancy schools in Mexico. I don't have that education, but she still asks me to proofread her stuff. And I know it bothers her, because I always have to make a lot of changes porque no tiene sentido en inglés {because it doesn't make sense in English}.

My transnational participants are doing quite well for themselves, relatively speaking, as teachers of English in rural Nuevo Leon by selling the cultural capital they gained "for free" in the U.S. Of course, the children of working class Mexican immigrants in the U.S. do pay a price for this cultural capital, but it cannot be measured in dollars or pesos.

THE PARTICIPANTS

I have divided this section into subsections, one for each of the participants. Each section contains significant background on my primary participants including information on their families, schooling history on both sides of the border, continuing contact with the U.S., and teaching positions in Mexico. I have included select stories from their life histories in order to provide a personalized perspective of who they are as individuals. In addition to the subsections on the five primary participants, I have chosen to include a sixth section on the father of one of these primary participants because it is with this first generation that the saga of immigration began.

Laura

Laura is thirty-three years old and lives in Montemayor, the town where she was born. She has shoulder-length, auburn hair, a light tan complexion, a smattering of freckles across her nose and dark brown eyes. She is the third of four children and the only daughter. Her parents had limited education in Mexico; her father went to school up to the fourth grade, and her mother only through third grade. Her father began working as a field laborer in the U.S., but worked his way up to become a mechanic. Her mother has always been a housewife because her father “would never allow my mom to work.” The family moved to the border town of Reynosa when Laura was an infant because her father had been working for several years as a field laborer in South Texas and had recently become “an official resident alien”. He wanted the family to be closer to where he worked, since he could now go back and forth legally. When

Laura was two years old, legal resident status for the rest of the family was approved and they moved to McAllen, Texas, and lived there for several months. Although she was too young to remember, the exact day they became legal is part of the family history passed down to her.

Laura: On Halloween's day, I was like two already, that's when we first crossed to McAllen as residents. So we lived like two or three months there in McAllen. Then we, my mother's sister, older sister lived in Denver, Colorado. So she's like, "Hey come over here. There's plenty of work and you know that way I won't be alone and we'd have company as sisters." So we moved to Colorado.

The family lived in Colorado until Laura was ten. Laura does not remember ever not knowing English. She used English at home with her brothers, and although her parents would speak to them in Spanish, they would usually answer back in English. About the only time she remembers using more Spanish was during yearly visits to Mexico. However, since the distance was so great and her father had few vacation days, the entire family generally only made the trip back to Montemayor at Christmas.

Laura: We would make trips back to Mexico like every, every December, like for Christmas. And so we would wait a whole year for only those two weeks. I would remember that a lot. And that's what I tell my husband, that I like Christmas time a lot because that was the time that I would get together with my grandparents and my, all the rest of the cousins and all that. So I would really look forward to December.

Despite the fact that the family spent little time in Mexico, her father continued to plan and invest for the family's eventual return. Laura has only a

vague recollection of her parents' original *casa de palos* {stick house}, although her older brother remembers living there. Over the eight years or so they were in Colorado, her father build a home in Montemayor and bought lots for each of his children. When her oldest brother was about to enter junior high, her father sent him back to Mexico to live with an aunt and attend school. According to Laura, her father did not want any of his children to attend junior high or high school in the U.S. because he feared that they would become too rebellious and use drugs. He sent his second oldest back to Mexico soon after to "keep the oldest one company." When Laura was ten, the entire family moved back to Montemayor. Her father had saved enough money to start his own business. However, the business was not as successful as he had hoped. Once again, he returned to the U.S. to work.

Laura: They liked it [Mexico] and that's what they wanted. But then my dad was used to working in the United States and the money in the United States. So when he tried to put something [a business] here, it didn't work at all. I mean, he wasn't, he didn't get the money that he expected, you know. So he said, "Well I will just go to Houston and it's closer." So he went to Houston and we all stayed here. And he used to come every weekend. And then, my mom used to leave with him for like two weeks and we would like stay with my aunt. So I was kind of used to that, changes and my parents not being there.

Although the children continued to live in Montemayor, they always spent summer vacations in Texas. Her oldest brother, who according to Laura is still angry at his parents for having sent him back to Mexico, dropped out of *prepa* in

Mexico and returned to the U.S. to work. Her middle brother, who also resented being sent back, finished *prepa* in Mexico and went to work in the U.S. Laura completed *prepa* and enrolled in business secretarial school in Monterrey. She did not do very well because she was “partying too much in the big city.” Her parents then made Laura and her younger brother move to Houston. Laura began working as a bilingual receptionist at a doctor’s office. Her younger brother, whose English is not very good according to Laura because he was so young when they returned to Mexico, did not make the transition back to the U.S. well. He attended two years of junior high and one year of high school, dropped out, and began working in Houston.

Laura and all of her brothers have married people from Montemayor. Currently her oldest brother and his family, her younger brother, and her parents live in Houston, which is about a ten hour drive from Montemayor. Her younger brother’s wife does not like living in the U.S. She and their daughter live in Montemayor with her parents, and Laura’s brother visits his family every other weekend or so. He is currently in the process of building a home for his family on the lot given to him by his parents. Laura’s parents also come back to Montemayor at least twice a month. They own homes in both Houston and Montemayor. Her oldest brother comes back usually only at Christmas. Her middle brother was killed in a car accident a few years ago; his widow and daughter live in Houston.

Laura married up in social class, which originally caused problems with her in-laws. Laura and her husband have alternated between living in the U.S.

and Mexico ever since their marriage, in part due to these problems. Laura became a U.S. citizen in order to speed up the process of legalizing her husband. Their ten year old son, Eddie, was born in the U.S. However, Laura also purchased an *acta chueca* {crooked or illegal birth certificate} for him in Mexico. Eddie attended preschool and kindergarten in Mexico, first and second grade in the U.S., and third and fourth grade in Mexico. Laura is not sure when they will return to the U.S. because they “seem to be doing okay financially right now.” Her husband does not like the U.S. very much and is now once again working in his father’s company. Laura says that her husband wasn’t used to “having to work so hard”, which was a problem in the U.S. because he worked as a dishwasher first and later as a roofer. Laura worked as a bilingual receptionist every time they went. During the times they lived in the U.S., they lived with Laura’s parents, which enabled them to save enough money to build their own home on her lot next to her parents’ home in Mexico.

When Laura first gave me directions to her home, she said it was “impossible to miss because it was the only one on that street with a pointed roof and a mail box out front”. The home is a spacious two bedroom, two bathroom house complete with breakfast bar, enormous closets and a bathtub.¹⁹ All the appliances except for the computer were brought over from the U.S. They own a late model SUV which Laura, as a U.S. citizen, keeps licensed in Texas because it is cheaper than licensing it in Mexico. Their old work truck is licensed in Mexico.

¹⁹ Bathtubs are not commonplace in Mexico. Even the \$200 U.S. dollars a night room at Howard Johnson’s hotel I stayed at in Monterrey during a conference did not have a bathtub.

Laura taught two levels of English at a *colegio* and had seven groups at an *escuela piloto* in Montemayor. She has recently been named English language coordinator for the newly expanded English program at the *colegio* and is also teaching two groups at a *primaria* near her home.

Lidia

Lidia is twenty-one years old and was living in Turco in her parents' home with her aunt and younger sister. She is of medium height and a little plump with dark waist length hair and enormous dark brown eyes. Lidia is the only participant who did not complete the entire interview and observation process because she decided to return to the U.S. midway through this study.

Lidia was born in Chicago and is the second youngest of seven children: four boys and three girls. Three of her siblings were born in the U.S. and three were born in Mexico. Their birthplace was apparently contingent upon the time of the year.

Lidia: If their birthday is in the summer or around Christmas, they were probably born in Mexico. Any other time of the year mostly they were born in the States.

Her father began working as an assistant in an auto repair shop and worked his way up to become a mechanic. Her mother is a nursing assistant. Neither parent completed elementary school in Mexico. Both her parents and four of her older siblings lived in Chicago at the time of this study. One of Lidia's brothers and her younger sister are living in Turco. Her parents had both been born in the U.S. when their parents were working the fields without papers

in South Texas. Lidia's parents did not decide to move to the U.S. until Lidia's mother was pregnant with her first child. They lived in South Texas and did field labor for approximately one year before heading north because Lidia's father had a cousin in Chicago.

Lidia attended pre-school and kindergarten in Chicago, first and most of second grade at a *colegio* in Mexico, third through sixth grade in Chicago, most of *secundaria* at a *colegio*, and half of ninth grade through twelfth grade in Chicago. She graduated from high school in Chicago in 1999 and began attending junior college part-time before deciding to return to Mexico. She says that she was a much better student in the U.S. than in Mexico and her report cards showed her to be a B student in the U.S. and the equivalent of a C student in Mexico.

I heard Lidia's Chicago accent the first time she spoke to me. However, I didn't discover until later that Lidia has a tremendous capacity for making people laugh by imitating a wide variety of accents from the English of the Greek owner of the diner where she used to work, to the Puerto Rican Spanish of her best friend, to her mother's accent in English, to the Mexico City accent of one of the cast members of Big Brother – Mexico; Lidia often had friends and relatives on the floor laughing. When I suggested she might want to think about becoming a comedian, she put on a very serious face and in an imitation of her father said, “Ay mi 'ja, who's going to give you a cheque for that? Mejor una estilista como tu hermana.” {Oh, my daughter, who's going to give you a check for that. Better to be a hair stylist like your sister.}

Lidia had been teaching English in *primaria* for a year and a half before deciding to return to the U.S. She taught a total of ten groups in seven different *primarias* in and around Turco. Midway through this study, Lidia decided to return to Chicago.

Lidia: I love Mexico and would like to stay here, but it's just not right for me, right now. Honestly, I love teaching, but I can make more money at McDonald's over there than I am making here y allá {there} I don't have to put up with la burocracia {the bureaucracy}. And besides I want to go back to college."

Her five older siblings have married people from Turco and two have also built homes there. She and her younger sister Delia are not married, although Delia is engaged to the neighbor's son. Like some of her older siblings who were born in Mexico, Delia recently became a U.S. citizen in order to speed up the process of gaining legal entry to the U.S. for her fiancé. Although he was originally going to cross illegally, the events of September 11 in the U.S. made the family "paranoid" and the couple decided not to risk it and to take the longer, legal route. The family home is a sprawling four bedroom, two bathroom home with a large back patio and front garden that was constructed slowly over the years while her parents worked in Chicago. Lidia says that it is much larger than anything they have ever lived in Chicago and that her parents "can't wait" to retire there.

Elvira

Elvira is nineteen years old and lives in the southernmost part of Nuevo Leon in Rancho del Valle, where she was born. She is tall and slender with a dark complexion and waist length black hair. I met Elvira when I gave her the oral exam required of English teachers. I remember being amazed at the time of the exam that she had only lived in the U.S. for three years from age fifteen to eighteen. She has a strong Texas drawl when speaking English and sounds like a native English speaker most of the time.

Elvira is the youngest of nine children with over a ten year age gap separating her from her sibling closest in age. Neither of her parents had the opportunity to attend school. They initially immigrated to the U.S. without documentation in the 1960's when the Viet Nam War was raging. Elvira's mother always returned to Mexico to give birth to her children because she feared the possibility that they would be drafted even after the both the draft and the Viet Nam War had ended. The children would remain in the care of their maternal grandparents. Thus, although the parents made frequent trips back and forth across the border as undocumented workers, they never wanted to put their children in the same position. Her father worked as a field laborer for one year and then as a carpenter, a trade he learned from his father, for forty-five years in Central Texas. Her mother cared for her father and occasionally worked cleaning houses. They are now retired and spend about half of their time in Rancho del Valle.

Her father and mother were granted amnesty and became legal residents as a result of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act. They applied for and obtained resident status for all of their children. One by one, Elvira's brothers and sisters began leaving for the U.S. to work after completing *secundaria* and/or *prepa* in a town ten miles away. Currently, two of her brothers and all four sisters live in Texas. One brother lives in Rancho del Valle and one brother "sometimes lives here and sometimes lives over there." All of her siblings own homes in Mexico, either in Rancho del Valle or the town ten miles away.

Elvira completed *secundaria* and had planned to attend *prepa*. However, by the time she got to *prepa*, the *prepa* in the nearest town was in disarray.

Elvira: Pues no sé qué pasó, pero the teachers stopped coming all the time and sometimes kids would go to school and there would be no teachers for like the whole week. Y pues, realmente, the students weren't learning nothing. Y *prepa* here, it's expensive. You have to buy books and stuff. You have to buy like twelve books. And it would just be a waste of money if the teachers don't show up. So, en el verano me fui para Estados Unidos para visitar a mi familia y ellos me dijeron que debería quedarme y estudiar la high school allá. {Well, I don't know what happened, but the teachers stopped coming all time and sometimes kids would go to school and there would be no teachers for like the whole week. And well, really, the students weren't learning nothing. And high school here, it's expensive. You have to buy books and stuff. You have to buy like twelve books. And it would just be a waste of money if the teachers don't show up. So, in the summer I went to the U.S. to visit my family and they told me that I should stay and study high school there.}

With no real option to continue her schooling in Mexico, Elvira entered high school in Central Texas as a sophomore. Although she stated that she knew very little English, she made phenomenal progress, exiting the ESL program in less than one year. She went on to pass the required standardized test in Texas and graduated on time in three years.

Elvira: You know like my brothers and sisters have been there a lot longer, but they don't know hardly no English. But I guess I am the only one who went to school over there. But still, I mean there I was translating for them. My dad he understands everything and will speak it if he has to. And he never studied it. My mom, too, she knows a lot. But I always liked English. I mean I had heard it whenever I went to the other side for a visit or my nieces and nephews came here. But I didn't learn much English in *secundaria* here. I mean first of all even though I couldn't talk English at the time, I knew that my teacher wasn't saying the words right. My ESL teacher over there said I was gifted at English, maybe that's true.

Although Elvira likes to think of herself as gifted in English, the fact that she has spent every summer in the Texas since the age of five is probably the main factor contributing to her rapid progress. I suspect that Elvira had a great deal of tacit knowledge of English because of her frequent visits to the U.S. and her interactions with her U.S. nieces and nephews who visited Mexico. This certainly comes through when she talks about the English classes she had in *secundaria* and correcting the teacher. Her English pronunciation is similar to that of a native speaker and unlike that of a non-native speaker. Although the critical period hypothesis is still very much in debate, it is safe to assume that most post-pubescent second language learners do not develop native-like

pronunciation. Furthermore, research indicates that students who immigrate to the U.S. at an older age with limited English proficiency simply do not have the time to develop the English language skills necessary to graduate high school before they reach age twenty-one (Thomas & Collier,1997). Yet, Elvira exited ESL before completing even her first year of high school and graduated on time at age eighteen.

Like her brothers and sisters, Elvira had intended to return to the U.S. in order to work because there are few job opportunities in Rancho del Valle or in nearby towns. However, landing a job teaching English has enabled her to stay in Mexico. She currently teaches thirteen groups at seven different elementary schools in the area. She lives with her parents on the sprawling family compound in Rancho del Valle. Ornately carved woodwork crafted by her father adorns the home. Her father raises horses and works on the ranch he bought when he retired. Her parents also own a home in Central Texas.

Carely

Carely nineteen years old and lives in Montemayor. She has long dark hair, dark eyes and a light tan complexion. She was born in Illinois, but was brought back to Mexico as an infant by her mother to be cared by her maternal grandparents. Carely's mother is the only one out of the five sets of parents who finished elementary school in Mexico. Her mother immigrated to the U.S. at age fourteen with her boyfriend. She first worked in the U.S. as a farm laborer and later as a bartender. Carely's father (with whom Carely has had no contact) is Mexican American. She has two half sisters, also born in the U.S., who are six

and eight years older than her. They returned to Mexico at the same time Carely did, but went to live with relatives of their fathers in Montemayor. Both have since married transnational men from Montemayor and now live in the Houston near their mother with their husbands and children. Her mother visits every other month or so, as do her half sisters.

When Carely was in kindergarten, her maternal grandmother passed away. As a result, she was sent to live with an aunt and uncle in Texas the summer before entering first grade. Carely says that she knew no English when she went there, but that her aunt and uncle made her use English in their home.

Carely: Agarré la onda bien rápido porque, era, era presión de mis tíos, que lo aprendiera y aparte porque me gustaba. Y es como me gustaba, yo le echaba bastantes ganas. Y leía, leía, trataba de entender, y escuchaba mucha música en inglés y leía la letra en inglés. Y aprendí la letra de las canciones y empezaba a más o menos saber que significaban y así es como aprendí. Pero porque me gustaba aparte. {I caught on quickly because it was, it was pressure from my aunt and uncle that I learned it and besides, I liked it. And since I liked it, I put in a lot of effort. I would read and read, trying to understand, and I would listen to a lot of music in English and I would read the lyrics. And I learned the lyrics of the songs and I began to more or less know what they meant and that how I learned. But because besides I liked it.}

Carely was the only participant who had access to bilingual education. She was in a bilingual program for the first grade, but exited the program by the second grade.

Carely lived with her aunt and uncle and attended school in Texas from the first to the sixth grade. She was a very active student, participating in dance

groups, poetry contests, and a host of other school activities. Although she loved school, she returned to her grandfather's home after he remarried.

Carely: Lo que pasa es que mi abuelito se vuelve a casar. Entonces, él me pregunta que quiero yo. Si me quiero quedar o si me quiero regresar. Entonces, yo tenía miedo que si yo le decía que no me regresaba, a él le fuera a pasar algo porque padece del corazón. Entonces, yo no me quería regresar, pero por sentimiento me regresé. {What happens is that my grandpa gets married again. Then, he asks me what I want. If I want to stay or if I want to come back. Then, I was afraid that if I told him that I wasn't coming back, something bad would happen to him because he suffers from heart trouble. Then, I didn't want to come back, but out of sympathy I came back.}

Carely says she is very close to her mother, although she has never really lived with her for any great length of time. However, she also considers her grandparents to be her parents. Her mother has always sent money back to pay for Carely's education in private schools. Consequently, she was able to attend the most exclusive private schools in Montemayor. Against the wishes of her grandfather, Carely married at age seventeen.

Carely: My grandpa was so mad porque no quería que nos casáramos. Like he was jealous of my husband. He still doesn't like him, pero le encanta mi huerco chulo. My mom didn't say anything. I mean what could she say. She ran off to the U.S. with her novio at fourteen. She has always done lo que le da la gana. Pero al fin de todo, mi abuelito lo aceptó y nos dio esta casa. Y yo, well, yo nomás quería tener... like my own family. {My grandpa was so mad because he didn't want us to get married. Like he was jealous of my husband. He still doesn't like him, but he loves my beautiful little boy. My mom didn't say anything. I mean what could she say. She ran off to the U.S. with her boyfriend at fourteen. She has always done what ever she felt like. But, in the end, my grandpa accepted it and he gave us this house. And I, well, I just want to have ... like my own family.}

Carely currently lives with her husband and their one year old son in a home that Carely's grandfather had originally built for Carely's mother (with money she sent him), in hopes of getting her to return to Mexico. Carely believes that her mother is never coming back to live in Montemayor because she is too independent and her father, Carely's grandfather, is a "control freak." He did, however, spend part of his lottery winnings to construct a second floor on the home for Carely's mother just in case she ever decides to come back to live in Mexico.

At age nineteen, Carely is an incredibly focused individual with an unbelievable amount of energy. She is studying to be a teacher full time in the mornings. She maintains the equivalent of an A average and is one of the top five students in her class at the *Normal* {teacher training school}. In the afternoons, she teaches English at four different elementary schools. Her in-laws care for her son while she is at school or work, but she cares for him the rest of the time because her husband manages a liquor store and works long hours. Her husband wants to leave for the U.S. now because he is tired of working long hours for little pay. Carely has convinced him to wait until she finishes because she knows there are various programs in Texas that recruit Mexican teachers for bilingual education. She figures she is a perfect candidate because of her English skills. Carely is currently pregnant with their second and what she says will be their last child - if it's a girl. Carely had difficulties obtaining a U.S. passport at the consulate in Monterrey despite having a birth certificate, school records and a

Social Security card. The process to legalize her husband and son is still ongoing. Carely has already made plans to stay with her mother and to give birth to her second child in the U.S. in order to avoid a similar lengthy process.

Nora

Nora is thirty-six years old and was my next-door neighbor in Lerdo. She has light brown hair and eyes, pale skin and is often referred to as *güera* in Mexico. Nora lives in the family home with her father and three year old, adopted daughter, Eva. Her father, Don José, never attended school and her mother, who passed away just before I came to Mexico, completed the second grade. Both parents were field laborers, first in Texas and later in California.

Nora was born in Texas, but lived in California until she was fourteen. She is the youngest of four, with a twenty year age difference between herself and her oldest sister. In fact, Nora has nieces who are older than her. One brother lives in California and two brothers and her sister live in Texas. All of her siblings have houses in Lerdo on the same block where the family home is located. I rented one of her brother's rental houses during my year in Lerdo. Nora's generosity and kindness greatly facilitated my adjustment to living in Mexico. She lent me a water heater and propane tank, negotiated a deal *debajo del agua* {under the table} with the phone company, helped me bargain for furniture, and made me feel a part of every family celebration from Thanksgiving²⁰ to her daughter's birthday.

²⁰ All of my participants celebrate Thanksgiving despite the fact that it is not a holiday in Mexico.

Nora says that English was her first language because although her parents did not speak English, they were always working.

Nora: I consider myself speaking first English because my parents, they, they were doing labor work. They were out in the fields all the time. I grew up with my cousins, and I talked to them mostly in English or Spanglish I guess. You know Bella and Betty, well they aren't really my cousins, they're my nieces, but they're more like cousins.

Recently, Nora was badly injured in a car accident that occurred in the mountains near Lerdo. When I arrived at the emergency room, I found her screaming at the emergency room personnel in English, which of course they could not understand. She did not regain her ability to speak Spanish until the following day.

Nora: See, I told English was my first language. I don't know what happened, but I just couldn't, I couldn't make anything come out in Spanish. And I was so mad that they didn't understand me. Thank God you got there and could translate for me.

She attended elementary school and through most of the eighth grade of junior high in California. However, summers and Christmas were always spent in Mexico because the family made the trek from California back to Nuevo Leon at least twice a year. She opted to continue her education in Mexico because her parents were in her words, "sort of retiring" and spending more and more time in Mexico, which interrupted Nora's schooling in the U.S. After Nora graduated from a secretarial school in Mexico at age eighteen, she worked teaching English at the same school for a year. She then decided to return to the U.S. and worked

for two years as a retail salesperson in California. However, her mother missed her and asked her to return to Mexico.

Nora: Have you seen that movie *Como agua para chocolate*?²¹ God, that's what my life has been, always doing what my parents want, always taking care of my parents. Sometimes I wonder if it's ever going to be my turn to decide what I want to do.

Since returning to Mexico, Nora has worked for more than fifteen years teaching English in both private and public schools. In most cases, she did not actively seek out employment; employers looked for her having heard that she knows English well. I happened to be with her when she was offered a job with the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* {UPN - National Pedagogical University} which runs at satellite program in Lerdo.

Lic. García: Soy la coordinadora de inglés aquí en la UPN. ¿Es Ud. Nora Garza Arroyo? {I am the English coordinator here at the UPN. Are you Nora Garza Arroyo.}

Nora: Sí soy Nora. {Yes, I am Nora.}

Lic. García: My students, they tell that you know English good.

Nora: Yeah, I know English pretty well. I went to school in States. This is my friend Mary, she's from the other side,

²¹ The film, *Como agua para chocolate*, was based on a novel by the Mexican author Laura Esquivel in which the youngest daughter is not allowed to marry because it is her responsibility to care for her mother.

she's doing her dissertation about people like me. As if I was so interesting.

Lic. García: Pues ahora tengo vergüenza de hablar inglés, tan bonito que habla Ud.. Es que estamos buscando otra maestra de inglés y pues, ya es obvio que el inglés de Ud. es perfecto. {Well now I am embarrassed to speak English, how pretty you speak it. It's that we're looking for another English teacher and it is obvious already that your English is perfect.}

The coordinator offered Nora the job then and there after hearing her utter only a few sentences in English.

Nora currently teaches English at a *prepa*, at the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* and at four *primarias* in Lerdo. Almost weekly, someone knocks at her door asking her to translate documents ranging from *maquiladora* contracts²² to birth certificate request forms. Nora also gives private English classes to a few employees of the *maquiladoras* located in Lerdo and to a couple of women whose husbands and/or children work in the U.S. She is working towards her *licenciatura* (bachelor's degree) in education at the *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional*.

The Family Patriarch: Don José

Nora's father, Don José, is nearly eighty years old. He was from a very poor, landless family that lived in a shanty town down by a nearby river on the outskirts of Lerdo. As a result, Don José never attended school and instead began

²² I personally saw three *maquiladora* contracts while I was living in Lerdo. All three were written in English and had been issued to employees who knew little or no English.

working at the age of five as a field laborer. He married young, and in hopes of one day building a home, Don José and his wife began working the fields intermittently in South Texas. With the money they earned through these years of sojourner migration, they were able to buy their first piece of land and begin building their home in Lerdo one room at a time. However, it became increasingly difficult to continue working even intermittently in Texas without documentation. Since his two oldest children had been born in Texas while he and his wife were there picking crops, these children were able to facilitate the process of obtaining legal immigrant status. Don José then moved the family to California where there was steady employment for most of the year at higher wages than Texas and cheap housing amidst the strawberry fields of a good *patrón* {employer}. He would spend over twenty-five years working for this same *patrón*. Although Don José still cannot bring himself to eat strawberries, he speaks fondly of his former *patrón*.

On the surface, Don José seems to be a very demanding, traditional man. He said little to me for the first two months I lived there, although he frequently told Nora that I must not be a very good “doctor” because there were never any patients lined up at my house. At Christmas time, when my boyfriend came to visit, Nora requested that I introduce him to her father as my husband rather than boyfriend in order to avoid a scene with her father regarding my lack of morals. Within five minutes of meeting my “husband” who lived *al otro lado* {on the other side of the border}, Don José invited him out to his ranch and orchard. Don José also became accepting of me because my “husband’s” visit transformed me

into *una señora decente* {respectable married woman}. A woman living alone because her husband is working *al otro lado* is common and understandable to Don José, but a single woman living alone is unacceptable.

It is typical for Don José who might be sitting within arm's reach of the refrigerator to yell for his daughter to get him a cold drink. After I became *una señora decente*, Don José would show up at my house on occasion carrying eggs and *carne seca* {dried beef} so that I would make him *algo de almorzar* {something for breakfast} when Nora was not home. Nora says that he knows perfectly well how to make his own food, but that he is *chiflado* {spoiled} and expects women to do the cooking. I was not about to argue with Don José about the equal rights for women because I knew that the only woman capable of changing his mind is Nora's daughter Eva. So, I just made him breakfast whenever he came knocking at my door.

Yet, for all his traditional ways, Don José never balked at paying to further his children's education, even that of his daughters. He sent his oldest daughter, Chavela, to a private secretarial school almost fifty years ago when he was still doing itinerant farm labor in Texas, and the family was living in a one room home. Education has always been a priority for this man who had never learned to read and write because he had to start working even before the age he should have entered elementary school. He really is not so macho and traditional after all.

Don José is not so traditional in what he likes to eat either. He has an affinity for certain food items from the U.S. Although his children living in Texas

come frequently, I would always ask Don José if he needed anything from *el otro lado* every time I was going over. He would inevitably ask for a couple of things; however, Nora usually had to translate for me.

Don José: Tráeme café, el verde cuadrado, y pollo, el blanco y rojo.
 {Bring me coffee, the green square kind and chicken, the
 white and red kind.}

Mary: I did not get that, Nora, and he'll yell at me if I ask him
 again.

Nora: He wants Taster's Choice decaf and a bucket of KFC
 [Kentucky Fried Chicken].

Don José always identified what he wanted by color and shape because he could not read the words on the packaging in any language. I never did figure out his system, but Nora always knew.

Don José has done very well for himself in Mexico with the money he and his wife earned as a field workers in the U.S. He owns three trucks and a car. Nora doesn't drive any of those because she has her own truck. The family home, which is now deeded to Nora, is enormous. Don José owns twelve, one or two bedroom rental houses which along with the family home, he built himself. He also has a small ranch where he raises a few head of cattle and two orange groves. He continues to expand his holdings with the monies from his rental properties and monthly Social Security check. When he leaves the house to sit in the plaza, he is dressed to the nines. However, he never goes to the central plaza in Lerdo.

Instead, he always goes to the *Plaza de los Ranchitos* where the rural poor tend to congregate. When I was talking about my research, an acquaintance in the U.S. suggested that Don José likes to show off, but it doesn't appear to be that way to me. Don José, for all his hard-earned possessions and the minimum of \$400 U.S. dollars in cash that he always carries in his pocket, prefers to socialize with members of the class into which he was born.

CHAPTER 5: PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOLING

Si el norte fuera el sur, sería la misma porquería.

Ricardo Arjona (1996)

Before I discuss my participants' perceptions of schooling on both sides of the border, it is important to reiterate several points regarding the background of these participants which are crucial to understanding their perceptions. First, these participants are from well-established transnational families and that have engaged in "transnational shuttling" (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Back and forth movement across the border has always been a part of their lives. Their legal status in the U.S. and in Mexico has been maintained, albeit somewhat creatively.²³As will be described later in Chapter Eight, these participants are from families that have developed essentially two home bases: one in the U.S. and one their parents' area of origin in rural Nuevo Leon. Although these participants are currently living in Mexico, they have had continuous, albeit secondhand, information concerning U.S. schools via their siblings, nieces, nephews, and cousins who visit Mexico or whom these participants visit in the U.S. Some of

²³ None has claimed dual nationality under 1998 Mexican Nationality Law. They are from established transnational families who created their own solutions for issues of legality and citizenship. Lidia and Carely were born in the U.S. and possess U.S. birth certificates, but also have Mexican birth certificates. Laura is a naturalized U.S. citizen, but lives in Mexico under her Mexican birth certificate. Elvira and Nora have permanent resident cards and Mexican birth certificates. Both Nora and Elvira continue to maintain their permanent resident status in the U.S., although they live in Mexico which technically is not allowed under U.S. immigration law, by using the address of siblings in the U.S. as if they were still living in the U.S. Nora was actually born in the U.S., but her parents mistakenly applied for permanent residency for her. She is currently in the process of reclaiming U.S. citizenship. Elvira is also applying for U.S. citizenship. However, both Nora and Elvira will continue to use their Mexican birth certificates in Mexico.

these relatives are doing well, while others are doing poorly in U.S. schools. The same holds true for Mexico; some relatives are successful, and others are unsuccessful in Mexican schools. Second, these participants are the children of rural marginalized working class Mexican parents. Their parents, as a result of their rural class position, had little or no access to formal schooling in Mexico. Therefore, these participants often tend to view Mexican schools both in terms of those they attended and those they believe they would have had to attend had their parents not immigrated. Third, these participants are all adults who are looking back at their years of schooling. Prevailing wisdom says that hindsight is 20/20, but in reality, the memories of yesterday often take on a rose-colored hue when one is involved in the struggles of today. Fourth, they have all been successful in school (albeit not without rough patches here and there) on both sides of the border. They have far exceeded their parents' education levels. All have terminal secondary school diplomas either from the U.S. or Mexico, and most have at least one year of post-secondary schooling. In other words, any barriers to their success in schools on both sides of the border have been overcome. They also believe they are in a better position to direct their own children's education than their parents were. Finally, they are all teachers of English in rural Nuevo Leon in the public school system and in some cases also in private schools. This means that when they discuss schooling in Mexico they are speaking from the perspective of students of yesterday and teachers of today. Although there is certainly a great deal of diversity within this group of five, the factors mentioned above are common to all.

I will be referring to Mexican schools and U.S. schools both because that is how my participants refer to them and as a matter of shorthand. However, it is important to remember that these participants have come to these generalizations based their exposure to a handful of schools in the U.S. and to a greater number of schools in Mexico, but all of which are located in their parents' rural area of origin. In other words, their perceptions are contextually based and should not be seen as representative of all schools in Mexico nor the U.S.

This chapter has three principal sections. In the first section, I explore the most prominent theme that emerges from their discussion of their schooling in the U.S.: the role of race and ethnicity. It is a topic that pervades the data and one that these participants keep returning to time and time again. The second section deals with social class in Mexico, which they see as the defining factor of Mexican schools. This theme emerges whenever they speak about Mexican schools. Finally, in the third section, I address their assertion that U.S. elementary schools are superior to those in Mexico on almost all measures including the areas of resources, physical characteristics of schools, an over-centralized Mexican education system, and pedagogy.

RACE AND ETHNICITY AS INESCAPABLE IN U.S. SCHOOLS

Race and ethnicity as an integral part of the U.S. schooling experience emerges as the most prominent theme across all participants. They refer to it repeatedly, and it was obviously the most troubling aspect of their schooling experiences in the U.S. It is important to stress that at no time during my

interviews or interactions with my participants did I raise the topic of race or ethnicity in U.S. schools. Instead, I asked them to tell me about their school experiences in the U.S. Therefore, this theme emerged as they talked about their experiences rather than in reference to a point blank question. The only question I ever asked related to race or ethnicity with respect to their schooling experiences was as follows: What was the ethnic or racial makeup of school X? I would ask this question at a later date after conducting the formal interviews. I believe that the fact that each of the participants, independently and without any prompting from me, talked about racial or ethnic incidents during his/her school years in the U.S. demonstrates how much race and ethnicity colored their school lives in the U.S.

The majority of the participants have class photos and yearbooks from their years in U.S. schools, and their characterization of the racial/ethnic composition of their respective schools is highly accurate based on the photos. Furthermore, their characterizations reflect the school segregation trends of each participant's schooling era. For example, older participants such as Nora describe being in schools which were majority white, while younger participants such as Lidia describe being in schools in which students were predominately of color. These descriptions agree with recent research on school segregation by the Civil Rights Project of Harvard University:

American Schools continue the pattern of increasing racial segregation for black and Latino students... Latino segregation by both measures has grown steadily throughout the past 28 years, surpassing the black level in predominantly non-white schools by 1980 and slightly exceeding the proportion in intensely segregated schools (90-100 % minority) in the 1990's... School segregation statistics show that the next generation of

Latinos are experiencing significantly less contact with non-Latino whites: 45% of Latinos were in majority white schools in 1968 but only 25 % in 1996 (Orfield & Yun, 1999, p. 14).

Thus, the fact that the older participants (Nora and Laura) were in much less segregated schools than the younger participants (Elvira, Lidia and Carely) can be substantiated by their own words, archival evidence such as class photographs, and recent national studies. Since the theme of race and ethnicity figures so prominently into their perceptions of schooling in the U.S., I have chosen to include select quotes from all of my participants regarding this theme.

Laura attended the same grade school in the 1970's from kindergarten through the fourth grade in Colorado. She says that the school she attended was racially mixed, with African American, Mexican origin and Anglo students, but that she cannot be sure of the exact ratio. As a person, she is very positive and upbeat and has few negative things to say about anyone or anything. She has glowing memories of her elementary school days in the U.S. and talks at great length about how much she enjoyed school. However, she is plagued with doubts about one aspect of her schooling in the U.S.: being placed in a remedial pull-out class.

Laura: I remember that I must have not been very smart or something because I was pulled out of class for this tutoring or remedial thing. Is that how you say it, remedial?

Mary: Yeah, remedial. Was it a language thing? Like an ESL thing?

Laura: No, it wasn't. I knew English before I went to school. I mean, I had two older brothers and older cousins and that's all we talked in to each other, English. And actually, we talked to our parents in English a lot of the time. They would answer us in Spanish, but they never made us speak Spanish to them when we lived over there, they understood a lot of English. They only started to worry about our Spanish just before we came back over here. So it wasn't a language thing. No, it definitely wasn't a language thing. I mean, there were no White kids in the tutoring, but there were Black kids, I remember, it was all Black kids and Mexicans. To this day, I wonder how come there were no White kids who needed tutoring? How come they got to stay in the regular class? I sometimes think it must have been a prejudice thing, you know, like racial or something, but who knows?

Laura is convinced that being placed in the remedial pull-out class had nothing to do with her English language skills. Although she originally believed she may have been placed there because she was not "very smart", she is uncomfortable with her original assessment of the situation and wonders whether race was a factor, since there were no Anglos in the remedial class. Certainly, I find it hard to accept that Laura, the intelligent woman I have come to know, who is coordinator of English language instruction at a private school and reads books on raising bilingual children in her spare time, was ever in need of remediation for anything. Whatever the reason for her placement in a remedial pull-out class might have been, Laura was determined to prevent the same thing from happening to her own son in the U.S. When elementary school officials in Texas sought to place her son in an ESL pull-out program, Laura successfully blocked the move,

informing them that she was quite capable of providing him with additional English instruction in the home.

Nora went to a rural elementary school in Central California during the 1970's. She described being the only Mexican in her grade school classes, although there were two Japanese Americans and one Filipino American. Her report cards show her grades to be very good, mostly B's, and class pictures demonstrate that her description of her classmates is very accurate. Her memories of grade school are all very positive, so positive, in fact, that she is adamant that her own daughter will attend elementary school in the U.S. However, she does not like to talk much about junior high school. Her grades plummeted to D's and F's. Although she attributes this to her inability to make the adjustment from a small rural school to a large junior high in a more urban area, race is another important factor contributing to the traumatic transition she experienced.

Nora: Seventh and eighth grade that was really hard. I mean, I went from this one little school where everybody was friends to the junior high and all the friends that I had in elementary weren't my friends anymore.

Mary: Why do you think that was?

Nora: Well there were a lot more different people at the new school.

Mary: And how did all those different people change things for you and your friends?

Nora: Well, like Black kids hung out with Black kids and White kids hung out with White kids and Mexicans hung out with Mexicans. And White kids had their own classes, so I didn't have any of my elementary friends in classes either...I mean I was really, really unhappy there. And that is what I remember most.

In the year I spent living next door to Nora, she frequently praised U.S. elementary schools and is by far the most adamant in stressing that the U.S. education system is better than the Mexican one. However, the above excerpt is one of the very few times that she even mentions the two years that she spent in junior high. Although I probed her on the matter, she usually stated that she does not remember very much about junior high. In contrast, her memories of elementary school remain clear and sharp. Taken as a whole, her dramatic drop in grades during junior high, her lack of memory of these years, and the fact that she chose to remain in Mexico rather than return to junior high school in the U.S. indicate that these years of schooling in the U.S. are particularly troubling to her. Furthermore, the only thing that she is unable to erase from her memory of these years are the racial and ethnic divisions which existed in her junior high school. Such divisions appear to have been exacerbated by school policies in which "White kids had their own classes" further separating her from her former friends.

Carely was born in the U.S., but was sent back to Mexico by her mother as an infant. When Carely was six she was sent to live with an aunt and uncle in the U.S. and attended grade school from first through fifth grade in Texas during the 1990's. She says that her school was all Mexican or Mexican American; the only Anglos in the school were teachers. Carely loved elementary school in the U.S.

and plans on having her own children attend elementary school over there. She never mentions racial tensions, but she does allude to distinctions between undocumented Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in school.

Carely: I am really grateful to my aunt and uncle, not just for taking me in, but also for all they did for me.

Mary: What did they do?

Carely: Well, like they were like Mexican Americans more than Mexican because they had been over there so long and like had already raised their own kids over there. And they showed me the ropes. And they became citizens too.

Mary: What do you mean by showing you the ropes?

Carely: Well, okay, like when I first went over there, they bought me clothes and stuff. I mean I had clothes, but not the right ones. Like I had a couple of nice dresses that I brought with me, but they were so Mex.

Mary: What do you mean so Mex?

Carely: Oh, you know, all the ruffles and bows and lace and pink shit. Well, I guess I thought I would wear one on the first day of school you know. Because it was like, the first day of school, special and all, and over there you don't use uniforms. And I had thought that those dresses I had were real pretty. But my aunt took me shopping to buy something else to wear on the first day of school. And

thank God she did. Otherwise, I would have been pegged as a mojadita {undocumented Mexican, literally wetback}, which I wasn't. I mean I was born in the U.S.

Mary: Was it bad or what to be pegged as a mojadito?

Carely: Bad. I wouldn't want to be one. And I am not one anyway.

Mary: Why wouldn't you want to be one?

Carely: I don't know how to explain it. But it wasn't good to be a mojadito. It just wasn't good. But because of all that my aunt and uncle did I got to be Mexican American, which I am anyways.

Mary: Were mojaditos treated differently in school by teachers or classmates or what?

Carely: Yes, no, well, I guess I don't know because I am Mexican American so I don't know if they were treated differently. Maybe I don't remember. I just know that I was glad that I wasn't one. Oh and my aunt and uncle made me speak English in the house when I first got there which was about two months before I started school. I didn't know any when I got there, but they would only talk to me in English and wouldn't give me nothing unless I asked for it in English. And so even though I got put in bilingual for the first grade, I knew a lot of English. And thanks to them, I got out of bilingual in one year.

Mary: And it was better not to be in bilingual?

Carely: Oh yeah, I mean, I think bilingual was like for dumb kids and mojaditos mostly. And I wasn't dumb or mojadita.

Despite her young age at the time, Carely displayed an awareness of the advantage of being American by birth rather than an undocumented Mexican in the school setting. It was obviously for Carely's benefit that her aunt and uncle refashioned her so as to be "classified" as Mexican-American. Her assessment of bilingual education provides further evidence that an institutional reform, even one such as bilingual education, which formed an integral part of the Chicano struggle for civil rights, in practice became a sorting mechanism which served to divide students of Mexican heritage. It is highly unlikely that a seven year old child would come to the conclusion that bilingual education was only for "dumb kids and mojaditos" unless that is the way it played out in practice and consequently was perceived as such by long-term, established residents such as her aunt and uncle.

Elvira attended Mexican schools from kindergarten through ninth grade. While visiting her parents and siblings in Central Texas over the summer, she decided to stay and attend high school there because the *prepa* near Rancho del Valle was in disarray. She entered as a sophomore in 1998 and graduated in 2001. There are two small cities which are located right next to each other in the area of Texas where Elvira lived. She describes West Town as predominately White and East Town as overwhelmingly African-American and Mexican origin.

I have been to the small cities that Elvira describes. Traveling between the two involves simply crossing the street. Consequently, Elvira's description of the two high schools in the area reflects the racial and ethnic divisions between the two cities.

Elvira: En East Town, éramos más mexicanos en la high school. Yeah. chicanos y mexicanos. Y morenitos. Lo que casi no había era white. En la high school en West Town, ahí había casi todos los gringos. {In East Town, we were mostly Mexican in the high school. Yeah. Chicanos and Mexicans. And Blacks. What there weren't hardly any of were Whites. In the high school in West Town, there were almost all the Anglos there.}

Obviously within the context of East Town high school, there could be few tensions between Anglos and Mexican origin students since there were almost no Anglo students in Elvira's high school. Although there were African-American students in her high school, Elvira devotes little or no attention to divisions between African-American students and Mexican origin students. Instead, she is consumed with divisions within the group of Mexican origin students and refers frequently to incidents between Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. Elvira asserts that the tension between the two was the worst thing about school, especially with respect to Texas' Ten Percent Law (H.B. 588). This law guarantees the top ten percent of graduating seniors in any Texas high school admission to any public university in the state of Texas, including the flagship universities of Texas A & M and the University of Texas at Austin.

Elvira: But the Mexican-Americans, that was the thing. Lo que veía, lo que yo veía, te echaba el Mexicano más que el

gringo o el morenito. Y era lo que a mí, me dolía porque yo decía, eres mexicano igual que yo, bueno, Chicano. Pero es, somos la misma raza y porque me, porque eres tú que me criticas. I don't understand it. We all have the same shitty jobs over there. Tenemos la misma vida. Pero, sí, el más feo fue la crítica. Que había mucho racismo. {But the Mexican-Americans, that was the thing. What I saw, what I saw, the Mexicans put you down more than the gringos or the Blacks. And that was what would hurt me because I would say, you're Mexican, the same as me, well, Chicano. But it's, we're the same race and why me, why are you the one who criticizes me. I don't understand it. We all have the same shitty jobs over there. We have the same life. But, yeah, the ugliest thing was the criticism. There was a lot of racism.}

Mary: ¿Racismo entre? {Racism between?}

Elvira: Entre Chicanos y Mexicanos. Eso fue lo peor. Lo peor. Y otra cosa. Eso de 10 percent plan. You know what that is? {Between Chicanos and Mexicans. That was the worst. The worst. And another thing. That 10 percent plan. You know what that is?}

Mary: Yeah, I know what it is.

Elvira: Ay, man did that cause escándulos every year. Porque a veces los que tenían las calificaciones más altas, pues eran Mexicanos y no Chicanos, y a veces pues mojados o sea los que no tenían papeles o sea la mica. And so like, pues, todos los años, los Chicanos se quejaban porque decían que los que no tenían mica weren't going to college anyway, so they were taking like a spot away from como un Chicano que sí quería ir a la universidad. I had a good friend like that. He was like valedic, ¿cómo se llama? {Oh,

man, did that cause scandals every year. Because sometimes the ones that had the highest grades, well, were Mexicans and not Chicanos, and sometimes, well, wetbacks, like those that didn't have papers or like a green card. And so like, well, every year the Chicanos would complain because they would say that those who didn't have a green card weren't going to college anyway, so they were taking a spot away from a Chicano that did want to go to the university. I had a good friend like that. He was valedic, how do you say that?}

Mary: Valedictorian.

Elvira: Yeah, eso. Y pues, todos los Chicanos were giving him shit about taking uno de sus lugares. Y él no era el único, pero ya que era mi amigo, yo sé que tan difícil era para él. He even had a teacher who asked him to give up his spot, ¿tú crees? Imagínate, una maestra. {Yeah, that. And well, all the Chicanos were giving him shit for taking one of their places. And he wasn't the only one, but since he was my friend, I know how difficult it was for him. He even had a teacher who asked him to give up his spot. Can you believe that? Imagine that, a teacher.}

Once again, specific institutional policies, in this case the Texas' Ten Percent Law, although designed to benefit minority students, tends to divide the Mexican origin students, pitting those who are U.S. citizens or legal residents against those who are neither. Elvira is not the first person I have heard mention the divisive effects of the policy. It was a concern among many of Mexican origin high school students I came into contact with while working with the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development in South Texas.

Lidia was born in the U.S. and attended kindergarten there. She attended first and second grade in Mexico. She attended third through sixth grade in a predominately Latino and African-American elementary school in Chicago. She returned to Mexico for seventh through half of ninth grade and then went back to the Chicago and completed her schooling, graduating from a predominately African-American and Latino high school in 2000. In describing her schooling experiences in the U.S. race, pops up as a frequent topic.

Lidia: You know what's really funny. I guess I always think of the States as a Gringo country, but I really have never gone to school with Gringos. I mean, they were always around, there's a lot of them in Chicago. I mean just go to the Loop. But it's like, they have their own schools or something. I probably shouldn't say this, but, no, I won't.

Mary: Go ahead, what were you going to say?

Lidia: Well, I think that the Gringos are really racist. I know that's a stereotype, but that's the way I see it. Like they want us to clean up after them, but not go to school with them...Well, I think Blacks got it the worst in Chicago. I mean everybody hates them including the Mexicans. I even said bad things about them and my parents, God, I could go on and on about what they think about the Blacks. I guess that makes Mexicans pretty racist too. But at least we go to school with them. I think that the Gringos are even more racist because they won't go to school with us or the Blacks.

Although Lidia views the U.S. as a "Gringo country", she had little or no contact with Anglos within the context of her schooling experiences in the U.S.

She classifies Mexicans as racist because of their animosity towards African-Americans as a group, but declares Anglos to be the most racist because she feels they will not attend school with Mexican origin students nor African-Americans.

Divisions within the group of Mexican origin students dominate Lidia's discussion of schooling in the U.S., even more so than the divisions between races.

Lidia: Actually old Mexicans hate the new Mexicans too.

Mary: What do you mean by old Mexicans and new Mexicans?

Lidia: You know like Mexican Americans and Mexicans, but, well, not really that either. Because Mexican American means you're born in the States, I think. Let me, maybe I can explain it. The old Mexicans are the ones that have been in the U.S. for a while. You know the legal ones, wait you can still be old Mexican if you're illegal, but been there a long time. And the new Mexicans are, you know, *mojaditos*, the ones that just got there, that don't know English, that look like they are fresh from *el rancho*. Like I'm an old Mexican, I'm, I was born in the U.S., but Delia [her younger sister] is old Mexican too and she was born in Mexico. But we're both old Mexicans because we know good English, we know how things work over there, we know how to dress and all that. I know that sounds bad, but the new Mexicans, they hate us old Mexicans too. Call us *pochos* and shit like that. It is really sick when you think about it. I mean really sick. I mean we come from the same *raza* {race} and we fight with each other.

Lidia is not quite sure how to refer to the Mexican origin students who represent opposite sides. Classifications such as "citizen" or "resident" are

inadequate, since she sees her whole family as pertaining to one side and yet members of her family fall into both categories. “Legal” and “illegal” are also cast aside, since she knows of legal and illegal members on both sides of the divide. In the end, she settles upon the self-invented terms of “old Mexicans” and “new Mexicans” to describe those who are respectively more and less assimilated into U.S. schools. In this way, her terms represent a division between those who “know how things work” in the U.S. and those who do not.

As all of the above excerpts illustrate, race and ethnicity are a factor of U.S. schooling which appear inescapable. Racial and ethnic divisions, as well as institutionalized racism in U.S. schools, have long been documented (Valencia, 1991, 2002; Pearl, 2002). These participants are certainly bothered by both racial/ethnic divisions and institutional practices which serve to separate White from Black from Brown. Yet, there appears to be a qualitative difference between the characterizations of these divisions. The older participants, Nora and Laura, who attended school in the 1970’s, never once referred to tensions within the Mexican origin student body. Instead, the divisions they described fall into clear-cut racial categories: White, Black, and Brown. In contrast, the younger participants, Lidia, Elvira and Carely, who attended school in the 1990’s and beyond, focused on and are most disturbed by the divisions within the Mexican origin student body. These younger participants attended school in the post-Amnesty era, during a time when immigrants in general and Mexican immigrants in particular have become the new enemy, scapegoats for all manner of social problems in the U.S. (Suárez-Orozco, 1998, Macedo & Bartolomé, 1998).

It is not surprising that this immigrant bashing should filter down into U.S. schools and divide Mexican origin students into those who are more and less assimilated. Indeed, California with its Proposition 187, which sought to deny public education and other services to the children of undocumented workers, provoked a ripple effect throughout the nation despite the fact it was declared unconstitutional. English Only laws were passed across the country, for the most part in states with large Spanish speaking populations. It became quite acceptable in the mainstream to demonize the “illegal immigrant hordes pouring across the border” and militarization of the border increased dramatically. Certainly, in such a climate, it might become important to distinguish oneself from the “enemy.” Lidia is quite astute when she describes the root cause of the divisions among Mexican origin youth:

Lidia: I think the problem is that everybody hates Mexicans these days. So maybe we old Mexicans try not to be like Mexicans, so people don't hate us.

It would appear that the climate in which younger participants found themselves in U.S. schools was also qualitatively different from the one which older participants experienced. Yet, as will be discussed later, this does not deter them from wanting their own children to attend elementary school in the U.S.

SOCIAL CLASS AS INESCAPABLE FACTOR IN MEXICAN SCHOOLS

Although my participants acknowledge “color” in Mexico by commenting on the light skin of most Mexican television stars and ruling elites, as well as on

the plight of indigenous peoples in areas such as Chiapas, on the ground level in these rural areas it seems to be a non-issue. Everyone in these areas is, after all, mestizo in varying shades. Instead, social class appears to override the color of one's skin. This is very evident in their discussion of Mexican schools. Whereas race/ethnicity is the overarching theme which emerges from their U.S. schooling experience, social class dominates their views on schooling in Mexico.

All of the participants assert that they have risen in social class in Mexico as a result of their families being in the U.S. However, most see themselves as remaining outside of the traditional class structure of Mexico. In essence, they view themselves as having access to the same institutions as the Mexican middle class, but are somewhat uncomfortable with their new position because they tend to see the Mexican middle class as looking down on the social classes from which the parents of these participants came. These participants have never been poor in Mexico. However, they see themselves as the children of yesterday's working poor, and feel that their lives might have been very different had their parents not immigrated. This change in class status greatly affects the way they view schools in Mexico in that they tend to use a "trifocal" lens, comparing essentially three types of schools: working-class public schools in Mexico, middle-class public and private schools in Mexico, and the public schools they attended in the U.S. In other words, they know about the public schools they attended in the U.S.; they know about the schools they *would* have attended in Mexico if their parents hadn't immigrated. Finally, they know about the schools that they *did*

attend in Mexico as a result of the increased economic resources which immigration brought to their parents.

Nora's parents willingly paid to further her education in Mexico, paying for "GED" elementary and secondary programs and tuition at a private adult *prepa* and a secretarial school. She now teaches English in four Mexican public elementary schools, one of which is located in Villa del Río, the poor area her parents are originally from.

Nora: God, some of the schools are so ugly. Well, you've seen how different they all are. Like that awful one in Villa del Río. All the chairs are broken. El pizarrón {chalkboard} doesn't work. And all those teachers do is complain about the kids. Es que son niños del rancho y no tienen la capacidad para los estudios. {It's that the children of the rural poor and don't have the capacity for studying.} Sometimes, I want to spit at those teachers. Mis apás son de Villa del Río. {My parents are from Villa del Río.} They don't even realize that had my dad not gone to the States, I would be one of those niños del rancho. Even at the UPN {National Pedagogical University} all the teachers complain about los niños del rancho. Well I would have been that, but no, to them, I am maestra {teacher} Nora. I thank God everyday that my parents made the decision to leave.

Clearly, Nora sees the quality of schooling in Mexico to be directly related to social class. Since her parents were members of the rural marginalized poor prior to immigration to the U.S., she believes that she would have had suffered as her students in Villa del Río currently suffer. Nora is probably correct in her assessment. I heard comments concerning the supposed lack of intellectual ability of poor rural children countless times while in Mexico. Furthermore, the schools

that the rural marginalized poor children attend appear to be much worse shape than middle class schools in terms of physical conditions, resources, and staffing.

Laura attended public elementary school for only one month in Mexico when her parents transferred her to a private school. She completed *secundaria* and *prepa* in private schools as well because her parents readily paid for all their children to attend private school in Mexico. Laura teaches in the private school she attended and in public elementary schools in Montemayor. In the following excerpt, Laura provided a class analysis of both private and public schools in Montemayor.

Laura: I guess my parents realized they made a mistake right away. I mean they first put us in public school because when we were in the States we went to public school and when they were little they went to public school for what little school they had. But when we moved back, they sort of caught on that if you have any money at all, you send your kids to private school. So since they had money, we went to el colegio.

Mary: What's the matter with the public schools in Mexico? I mean, your son attends one.

Laura: Well, I am not saying that there aren't a few good public schools in Mexico. The one my son goes to is very good, but it is connected to la Normal {teacher training school}. And my husband used his palancas {connections} to get him in there because I refused to send him to private school.

Mary: Why?

Laura: Look, I teach in public elementary schools and I know how bad some of them can be. I mean teachers that don't teach, books that don't arrive, not enough desks, broken windows, you name it. But I also went to el colegio and teach in el colegio {a private elementary/secondary school} and I don't want my son to be like those kids.

Mary: Why? What's wrong with those kids?

Laura: Well, most of them are rich, spoiled brats if you ask me. They think they are so special because their parents are rich. They think they don't have to work hard. And I want my son to know about hard work.

Mary: But you went to el colegio, too.

Laura: Yeah, but I had my parents as roles, ¿cómo se llaman?

Mary: Role models.

Laura: Yeah. Role models. And even though we had money, we were never part of high society Montemayor. And I don't want my son to be like that. I want him to be a hard worker.

Although she attended and currently teaches in a private school, she refuses to send her own child to private school because she fears the corrupting

influence of middle class Mexicans. Instead, she maneuvered to get him into what is considered to be the best public school in the area. The public school her son attends is without a doubt one of the best I saw while I was in Mexico. Although the private school she attended and where she currently works appears to me to have more resources, Laura feels establishing a strong work ethic in her son is more important than resources. It is a compromise she has reached with her middle-class Mexican husband. Laura's original plan involved having their son complete elementary school in the U.S. However, her husband desired to return to Mexico because, as Laura stated, "He wasn't used to working so hard." Her husband wants their son to attend private school, but Laura would only enroll him in public school in the hope that he would learn the value of hard work, which she acquired from her rural working class parents. Clearly, she is uncomfortable in her current position as a middle-class Mexican and seeks to pass her working class values onto their son.

Lidia attended only private schools in Mexico, but currently works in seven public elementary schools around Turco, where her family is from. She attended public schools in the U.S. She frequently made note of the lack of resources in Mexican public schools and the hardship of being poor in Mexico during her discussion of Mexican schools.

Lidia: I didn't mind school all that much here in Mexico, but thank God my parents had money to pay for private school. I mean, I went to public school always, always I went to public school in the States, but not in Mexico. God, even the worst public schools in Chicago have more stuff than the best private schools here. But at least I wasn't in public school here in Mexico. That would have been the fucking pits. I sometimes want to cry when I see how bad the

public schools are here. And el turno vespertino {afternoon session}, man, what a mess.

Mary: Why is el turno vespertino such a mess?

Lidia: All the really, really poor kids, not just the poor kids, I mean pretty much everyone in the elementary schools where I'm at now are poor, the public ones, but the really, really poor kids get stuck in the afternoon. I mean at one of the schools all the afternoon teachers work a turno matutino {morning session} at another school, so when they get to the next school in the afternoon, they spend the first hour eating dinner and the kids just mess around outside. And the kids that go are so poor they can't even afford uniforms. One little boy in my class had a shirt on that said McCollough Cheerleader. He asked me what it meant, you know, because I'm the English teacher. I didn't have the heart to tell him he was wearing a girl's shirt. I just said that it gave the name of the school. I am sure that he probably got it as part of a charity bundle from some church. And we still don't have books at that school either. And the blackboard is all cracked up. The desks are falling apart. I always wonder if we would have went to that kind of school if my parents hadn't gone al otro lado {to the other side of the border}. I mean we would have been poor here. Well, we were, or are, I guess, poor in the States, but not like here. Here if you are poor you don't have a chance. But because my dad works over there, we weren't poor when we were here. So we went to a private school. And that wasn't too bad, but I still missed the schools over there when I was here.

Like Laura and Nora, Lidia sees Mexican schools almost wholly through the lens of social class. She believes that her access to quality education in Mexico was only possible because of the money her parents earned in the U.S and

shudders to think what her schooling would have been like had her parents remained in Mexico. Interestingly, she and two of her sisters returned to Mexico the first time because her father was laid off in Chicago. By sending the youngest children back to Mexico to be cared for by their grandparents, her mother was able to pick up double shifts as a nursing assistant. Despite the financial difficulties, her parents managed to pay for both tuition and transportation, so that Lidia and her sisters could attend a private school almost twenty miles away in Montemayor, rather than attend public school in Turco.

Carely attended a public elementary school in South Texas from first through sixth grade. When she returned to Mexico, she attended a private Christian school in Montemayor. Although her family is nominally Catholic, this school is one of the most exclusive schools in the area and her mother, who continues to live in the U.S., wanted Carely to have the best possible education. Carely is currently studying to be a pre-school/kindergarten teacher at a teacher training college. She teaches English at four different public elementary schools in Montemayor and the surrounding area.

Carely: My mom paid for my school because she wanted me to have the best and my papi {grandfather} wanted that too... Actually here in Mexico if you have any money at all, you send your kids to private school. The public schools here are ugly. But personally I don't think that las particulares {private schools} are much better.

Mary: What do you mean by ugly?

Carely: Run down, too many kids, not at all like the public school I went to in Texas. I loved it there. That's what I want for my kids. At least elementary school. They make everything like a game over there. And there are so many things over there, like books, nice playgrounds, after school activities. I hated school when I came back here and I loved it over there.

Mary: But you are studying to be a public school teacher here, right?

Carely: Not really, well yeah, but I plan to go over there when I am done. Sometimes, people come from the States to talk to students at la Normal about going to teach over there. Most can't go because they don't have the English, but I do. My husband wants to go now, but I told him to wait 'til I'm done. I don't know if I want to live in the States forever or nothing, but for awhile would be good.

Despite the fact that she attended the most expensive private school in Montemayor, Carely still believes that she received a better education at a public elementary school in Texas and intends to have her own children attend elementary school in the U.S. In fact, this is one of the reasons she is studying to be a teacher in Mexico. She is aware that U.S. school districts have recruited Mexican school teachers to work in the U.S. Carely sees herself as a perfect candidate because she is proficient in English and is a U.S. citizen. Regardless of whether she is successful at obtaining a teaching position in the U.S., I have no doubt her children will attend school there. Her sisters have already relocated to Houston so that their children can attend school.

Elvira lives in what is considered to be the most impoverished region in the state of Nuevo Leon. She has only ever attended public schools on both sides of the border. In the *ranchos* where she is from there are no private schools, nor any secondary schools. There is only a two room elementary school with two teachers. One teaches first through third grade in one room and the other teaches fourth through sixth grade in the other room. In a small city nearby, there are likewise no private schools, but there is a public *secundaria* and a public *prepa*. Those who live outside of the small city must either board in the city or travel daily if they live close enough and transportation is available. According to Elvira, most of the young people who live in the outlying *ranchos* do not complete any level of secondary school because they cannot afford it. Of all the participants, Elvira is the least critical of Mexican schools, in part because she is the only participant who had to make the initial transition as a high school student.

Elvira: It's really hard in Mexico. Most of the kids here in Rancho del Valle nomás terminan la primaria porque no hay secundaria ni prepa aquí. You have to go like ten miles to get to one. My brother took me everyday, just like I take mi ahijada now. And even then, well, como que, like my parents bought me a computer because pues, we had clases de computación en secundaria pero no había computadoras en la escuela. So what was the point? And well, I ended up going to high school over there because the prepa aquí was in bad shape. Teachers didn't show up. I don't know what was happening en ese entonces. It seems to be better now, pero ¿quién sabe?...México es un país pobre y creo que es más difícil ser pobre aquí. Nosotros tenemos lo que tenemos porque mi apá trabajó allá. No somos como los esnobs aquí que son de familias adineradas. We were able to study because mis apás worked over there. Todos nosotros, mis hermanos y yo, terminamos la secundaria y

pues, la mayoría hizo la prepa también. And I did high school over there 'cause of the problems here, pero sin el dinero de allá, we would have probably only finished primaria aquí. If you are poor here, there is no hope. The government has forgotten about the people who live here. Creo que es mejor en Monterrey, pero aquí no. Aquí no hay nada. {It's really hard in Mexico. Most of the kids here in Rancho del Valle only finish elementary school because there is no secundaria or prepa here. You have to go like ten miles to get to them. My brother took me everyday, just like I take my god-daughter now. And even then, well, it's that, like my parents bought me a computer because well, we had computer classes in secundaria, but there were no computers in the school. So what was the point? And well, I ended up going to high school over there because the prepa here was in bad shape. Teachers didn't show up. I don't know what was happening at the time. It seems to be better now, but who knows?... Mexico is a poor country and I believe that it is more difficult to be poor here. We have what we have because my dad worked over there. We aren't like the snobs here that come from wealthy families. We were able to study because my parents worked over there. All of us, my siblings and I, finished secundaria and well, the majority did prepa too. And I did high school over there 'cause of the problems here, but without the money from over there, we would have probably only finished primaria here. If you are poor here, there is no hope. The government has forgotten about the people who live here. I think it is better in Monterrey, but here no. Here there is nothing}

As with all these participants, Elvira sees a strong correlation between social class and schooling in Mexico. She is also the participant who makes the strongest criticism of the urban/rural divide affecting one's educational and life chances in Mexico. Of course, all but one of her siblings has had to immigrate to the U.S. in order to find work. It is the path she too would have taken, but for the

fact that she is able to earn a living teaching English in this impoverished rural area.

There was a qualitative shift in perspective in Elvira from the first time I interviewed her to the last time. Initially, she was thrilled to be back in Mexico after completing high school in the U.S. and consequently was much less critical of Mexican schools. As time went on, however, she grew tired of constantly fighting for books and supplies, and frequently complained about education officials in Monterrey. She resented the fact that all teacher training workshops took place in Monterrey and had stopped even trying to attend them. The last time I interviewed her she had already decided that her future children would attend elementary school in the U.S. Although she never attended elementary school in the U.S., she has nieces and nephews who do. She believes that elementary schools, at least, are better in Texas than in the area she lives in Mexico.

SUPERIORITY OF U.S. ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

As a whole, all participants believe that U.S. elementary schools are better than Mexican schools on almost all counts. Obviously, the lack of resources in Mexican schools was one of their major complaints that surfaced time and time again. They feel they had greatly benefited from their years in U.S. schools because there is just so much more to work with, especially with respect to the availability of books. When asked to talk about a favorite memory of school in the U.S., all told of how much they enjoyed story time where they sat around on a

carpet as the teacher read a storybook to them. Even Elvira was familiar with story time, having visited the classrooms of her nieces and nephews in the U.S. Nora actually began to cry as she related the following episode.

Nora: I used to love listening to the teacher read to us. We would all sit around her on this carpet in a nice warm classroom and listen. *The Velveteen Rabbit*. Miss Lavreen read us that story. And everyone was so quiet because the story was so good. We all wanted to hear it. They don't do that here in Mexico. There is no story time. Eva [her daughter] is going to have that. I read books to her at home, but I want her to go to school where there are lots of books and the teacher will read to her. I want her to be warm and sitting on a carpet. I don't care if I have to work at McDonald's. Eva is going to school over there.

Like Nora, all these participants believe that the lack of print materials negatively affects the learning process in Mexico. For example, while some believe that Mexican schools attempt to do a good job at teaching the basics of reading, there is little for children to read outside of their textbooks. The only place I saw children's books in these rural areas was inside the homes of Nora, Carely, and Laura. They or their relatives had acquired English, Spanish and bilingual children's books in the U.S. for use with their children. When Nora's daughter Eva began attending a middle-class preschool, the teacher requested that each child bring a children's book in order to create a classroom *rincón de lectura* {reading corner}. Out of the twenty or so children in her pre-school class, Eva was the only child who had any books to bring, and she brought five because she could not decide which of her many books was her absolute favorite. Of course, I did not see children's books in the homes of Elvira or Lidia because they did not

yet have children, but there were stacks of romance or mystery novels in English which they read for pleasure. Elvira, who is the least critical of Mexican schools, stated, “I learned to read in Mexico, but I learned to love to read in the U.S. because there are books over there.” She is correct in her assessment; I saw very few books, children’s or adult’s, for sale in these rural areas, nor did I see many in any homes except those of these participants.

As is illustrated in most of the preceding comments, these participants also negatively assess the creature comforts of Mexican elementary schools. They believe it is difficult for children to concentrate because these schools are too cold in the winter and too hot the rest of the year. They talked at great length about how they do not want their children to suffer these extremes. The poor condition of the physical plant and basic equipment such as desks and chalkboards in areas of high poverty is particularly distressing to these participants because most believe these were the schools they would have attended had their parents not immigrated. They attribute such conditions to the state and national education policy of depending upon parents’ associations for the upkeep of public elementary schools. As Lidia stated, “How do they [education officials] expect parents to contribute to the school when they are living in pretty much shacks?” School lunches in the U.S. are also given rave reviews. Although these participants never went hungry, nor would their own children go hungry, they teach in schools where children are indeed hungry.

Over-centralization of the education system in Mexico is also seen as problematic. Although these participants admit that in recent years there has been

an attempt to decentralize, they believe that what has in effect happened is that now, instead of public elementary schools being run out of Mexico City, they are run out of Monterrey. There is a great deal of animosity towards education officials in Monterrey, so much so, that they appear to be the “axis of evil” upon which most ills are blamed.

It is true that all roads lead to Monterrey in these rural areas. All of the English teacher training workshops I attended were held in Monterrey. Attending such a workshop entails a two hour trip for participants such as Carely and Laura, but a five to six hour trip for Elvira. No stipends are given to defray the costs of travel. Of course, education officials frequently complain that rural English teachers are not as committed because they often fail to attend the training workshops. Textbooks and paychecks are sent out from Monterrey, and neither consistently arrive on schedule. General elementary teacher placements are also made in Monterrey which, according to several participants, means that the worst or least experienced teachers are sent to the most impoverished rural schools.

These participants even doubt educational progress statistics produced by state education agencies. When Lidia received a memo stating that the official elementary school attrition rate in Nuevo Leon was less than one percent, she could hardly contain her disdain.

Lidia: Less than one percent. Ha! Who are they kidding? Look at Mireles school, for one, there are two first, second and third grades. Then it drops to one fourth grade and by the time you get to sixth grade there are only a handful of students left. Those kids aren't dying off, you know. They are dropping out of school because they are poor and have to work.

The general consensus among these participants is that state education officials are corrupt and self-serving, and that nothing coming out of Monterrey is to be believed. I have no way of knowing if their cynical perceptions are on target. However, Lidia seems to be correct with respect to the elementary school attrition rate, at least in these rural areas. I saw a fair number of elementary schools where the number of younger students is twice that of older students. Given the fact that both the fertility and birth rates in Mexico have been decreasing across all social classes since the 1970's (Naik, Fuhrmans, Millman, Fassihi & Slater, 2003), I am inclined to believe that many older students are leaving elementary school before completing all six grades.

In the area of pedagogy, these participants assert that U.S. elementary schools are superior in several ways. First, they believe that there is too much emphasis in Mexico on rote learning and direct copying of what the teacher says or what is written in textbooks. In contrast, U.S. educational activities are seen as more creative and hands-on; learning is "more of a game". Elvira is the only participant who does not state that this is the case. Instead, she sees little difference in the quality of instruction between the U.S. and Mexico. Of course, she is the only participant who had never attended elementary school in the U.S. Second, these participants believe that instruction centers too heavily on passing exams that come out of Mexico City (filtered through Monterrey), which have little to do with the realities of life in these rural areas. Third, they see Mexican schools as not going beyond the basics. There is nothing remotely resembling the classes in art, music and physical education that they had experienced in the U.S.

Laura went so far as to enroll her son in private martial arts classes because he missed physical education when the family returned to Mexico. Ironically, the things they appreciate most about U.S. schools are precisely those that I see disappearing, at least in working class schools in the U.S., as a result of budget cutbacks and the move toward standardized testing.

In summary, these participants have such positive opinions of U.S. elementary schools that they want their own children to attend at least elementary school in the U.S. Laura was very upset that her husband wanted to go back to Mexico before their son had completed elementary school in Houston. Carely and Nora have already formulated plans to move to the U.S. so that their children can attend elementary school there. Lidia cannot even envision the possibility of her children attending elementary school in Mexico. Elvira, who never even attended elementary school in the U.S., has nieces and nephews who do and she informed her fiancé just before I left Mexico that their future children would be attending elementary school in the U.S.

While these participants are unanimous in praising the glories of elementary school in the U.S., they are often silent on the subject of U.S. secondary schools. While they assert that secondary schools in the U.S. are not the hotbeds of violence, drugs and sexual promiscuity they are commonly believed to be in Mexico, they are less sure about wanting their children to attend secondary school in the U.S. They see secondary schools in the U.S. as too big and impersonal, and prefer the cohort type system which exists in Mexican secondary schools. Certainly, they believe their familiarity with the education

system in the U.S. and their English proficiency put them in a better position to monitor their children and contribute to their success in U.S. secondary schools than were their own parents. Yet, there is a sense of uncertainty from all but Lidia. As a whole, their attitude is one of “let’s wait and see what happens.” I got the feeling that at the first sign of trouble, they will not hesitate to pack up and move back to Mexico with their children. Well-behaved adolescents rank higher on their list of priorities than educational opportunities.

CHAPTER 6: TRANSITIONING BETWEEN TWO SCHOOL WORLDS

He escuchado a mis hermanos criticar mi condición, porque hablo dos idiomas, más inglés que el español.

A. B. Quintanilla y los Kumbia Kings (2001)

In this chapter, I describe the themes that emerged when these participants discussed their experiences of moving from one country's education system to another's. There are two principal sections to this chapter because two types of transitions were made: U.S. to Mexico and Mexico to the U.S. In the first section, I discuss the experiences of the participants, Laura, Carely, Nora, and Lidia, who began their schooling in the U.S. and then entered Mexican schools. The second section covers the two participants, Elvira and Lidia, who went from Mexican schools to U.S. schools. Lidia, of course, appears in both sections because she made transitions in both directions more than once. I have divided each section into two parts. The first deals with the institutional barriers that affected them as they changed education systems. In the second, I discuss the emotional costs of the transition. Finally, I conclude with a brief summary of the major themes covered in this chapter.

U.S. TO MEXICO

Institutional barriers

For those participants who made the transition from U.S. to Mexican schools, their successful integration was hampered by a variety of factors, including institutional structures which worked against them. However, their parents used economic resources earned in the U.S. to lessen the institutional barriers to their children's success in school in Mexico.

Nora, who had attended school in the U.S. through the eighth grade, was not allowed to enroll in a regular public *secundaria* until her transcripts had been validated by government education officials. Neither she nor her mother, who was the most active parent in Nora's education, had much faith that this validation would come through quickly. Fearing that Nora would have to wait at least a year before beginning school again, they convinced the administration of a private secretarial school to accept Nora without meeting their requirement of a *primaria* diploma. While attending this secretarial school during the day, Nora spent the first three months pouring over *primaria* textbooks in the evening in order to take a public school "GED" type test which provided her with a *primaria* diploma. This allowed her to attend evening classes in a public adult "GED" program in order to complete *secundaria*. By the end of a year and a half, she had almost completed *secundaria* via an adult education "GED" program. At this time, the validation of her transcripts came through and she was able to switch to a different private adult education program in order to earn her *bachillerato* {high school diploma} from *preparatoria*. At the end of three years of double duty,

(secretarial school during the day and regular education in the evening), Nora had earned a diploma from a private secretarial school, public school GED diplomas for *primaria* and *secundaria*, and a *bachillerato* from a private evening *preparatoria*. Although Nora said that her parents were not involved in her education in the U.S. because they were always working, she talks a lot about her parents' role in supporting her and her siblings' education in Mexico.

Nora: You know it is pretty amazing when you think about it. I mean my parents had pretty much zero education...But they paid out money like for Chavela [her older sister] to go to secretarial school and that was like over forty years ago, like almost fifty, and that was when they were still working *la pizca de vez en cuando* en Tejas {the harvest sometimes in Texas}.... And they paid out a lot for me. I mean, I remember when they told me that I would have to wait till my records from California were approved. I was like crying and *mi amá* {my mom} said that maybe we could get a private school to take me and my dad said okay. She got all dressed up and went with me to that secretarial school to get them to take me. And they spent a lot of money, I mean a lot of money for them, you know, for the secretarial school and for the GED elementary exams and the night school for *secundaria* and everything. And that's really a lot, you know how *codo* {cheap} my dad is, but he like gave my mom cash to pay for the whole year at that secretarial school. And even now, like when I have to go out of town for like something like training, something for like *la prepa*, *mi apá* no se queja tanto {my dad doesn't complain so much}. And he complains about everything, but not about that as much.

Although Nora's parents had very little education themselves, they willingly paid her tuition for the entire year using money they had earned in the

strawberry fields of California. Their dedication to Nora's schooling was immeasurable. Having lived next to Nora's father, Don José for a year, Nora's portrayal of him is on target. He does indeed complain about almost everything and would rather sit shivering in dark than "waste" money by turning on lights or an electric heater. Yet, he willingly paid for an entire year, upfront in cash, so that his daughter could attend school rather than wait for state education officials to provide the needed validation of her U.S. transcripts.

Laura completed the fourth grade and half of the fifth grade in Colorado. When the family returned to Mexico, public school officials bumped her back to the fourth grade and suggested that if she made progress they would let her continue on to the fifth grade the following year. According to her parents, they did this without even looking at her school records from the U.S. Laura said that after a couple of months of hearing her "cry about school every day", her parents switched her to private school and hired an elementary school teacher to tutor her in the afternoons, in order to ensure that she would not have to repeat the fourth grade a third time. Like Nora parents, Laura's willingly paid to further the education of their children in Mexico.

Lidia, along with one older and one younger sister, returned to Mexico to live with their grandparents because her father had lost his job in Chicago. By sending them back, Lidia's mother was able to work double shifts at the hospital. Lidia had completed Head Start and kindergarten in the U.S. Her younger sister, Delia, had completed Head Start; and the older sister Marta had completed the second grade. When their grandparents attempted to enroll them in

public elementary school, they were told that Lidia would have to repeat kindergarten and Marta would be bumped back to the first grade. Despite financial difficulties, their parents sent money to enroll the girls in private school. In the following excerpt, Lidia stresses the sacrifices her parents made.

Lidia: I don't think they really understood the school system much in Mexico either. I mean not the first time. I mean no one did. Like my parents never had finished even la primaria and my grandparents were the ones taking care of us and they had never set foot inside a school, I mean like as students. But when my parents heard that me and Marta were going to have to repeat grades, they didn't think it was fair. They didn't think like the government, like the schools, had any right to do that. So they scraped the money together and paid for el colegio and gave my grandparents money to get us there because el colegio was like ten miles away.

Although her father was unemployed at the time, which was the reason the younger children were sent back to live in Mexico to begin with, the family managed to find the resources to pay private school tuition and transportation costs. Like Nora's parents, Lidia's parents had little faith in public education officials.

Carely attended kindergarten in Mexico and first through fifth grade in the U.S. When she returned to Mexico and tried to enroll in public school, her grandfather was told that she would be placed back into the fifth grade on a trial basis. If she did not demonstrate sufficient skill, they would put her back in the fourth grade. Upon learning that her daughter would be moved back at least one grade, Carely's mother immediately wired money so that Carely could attend

private school. In this way, Carely was able to stay on grade level. Her grandfather also hired a tutor for the first six months in order to help Carely succeed.

I asked my contacts in public education in Nuevo Leon if there is a set policy regarding transfer students from the U.S with respect to repeating grades or enrolling mid-year. They said there is no formal policy or testing program on the primary or secondary level, but that school administrators may make grade placement decisions on an individual basis if it is in the best interest of the child involved. As for students transferring mid-year, much is dependent upon the schools in which these children trying to enroll. If the schools are already overcrowded, children may have difficulty enrolling. However, progress has been made in this area. Public education officials have developed a new program for children of parents who engage in circular migration, six months in Mexico and six months in the U.S., which is currently only available in high need areas. At the level of *preparatoria*, which is above the age of mandatory schooling in Nuevo Leon, much depends upon whether a given public *prepa* uses an entrance exam as the sole basis for admission. Some education reformers have pushed for the creation and expansion of public *prepas* which use multiple criteria to determine admission. Education officials also stated that the process of validating U.S. transcripts has been streamlined. Nora herself asserted that it seems to her that transcript validation moves quickly now, judging by the number of transnational students she currently has in her classes. Increasing cooperation

between both nations with respect to transnational students has been documented in the literature (Dorn, A. 1996, Dolson, D. et al. 1996).

In any event, the parents of these participants utilized their financial resources in order to further their children's education in Mexico. While most of these participants mention that their parents had very low levels of education and little knowledge of schools even on Mexican side of the border, their parents did understand that their increased economic power would serve to buy a better education for their children in Mexico. Certainly, economic hardship, and by default lack of social mobility, is what drove their parents to immigrate in the first place. This paints a picture contrary to the stereotypical beliefs about Latino parents held by many educators in the U.S.: "Hispanic parents are neither committed to nor involved in their children's education" (Valdés 1996, p. 33).

As a whole, the fact that the parents of these participants place a high value on education in general comes through loud and clear if one knows how to read the signals. For example, one evening Nora, Don José, Nora's three year daughter Eva and I were sitting outside on rocking chairs pulled into the street as was customary in Lerdo, saying "adios²⁴" to all who passed by. Nora was reading the local scandal sheet aloud to her father while Eva sat on the street turning the pages of one of her many storybooks²⁵. After Nora finished reading, Eva climbed up on her grandpa's lap and the following interaction took place.

²⁴ "Adios" is a customary greeting in the area when a neighbor or friend passes by on the street, but does not stop and chat.

²⁵ Nora attributes her love of reading to her exposure to storybooks in the U.S. Since Eva was born, Nora has surrounded her with children's books in English, Spanish or both, which her brothers get for her in the U.S. at flea markets and garage sales.

- Eva: Ahora me toca a mí, apá. Le voy a leer este libro. “¿Tu mamá es una llama?, le pregunté a mi amigo Federico.” {Now it’s my turn, grandpa. I’m going to read you this book. “Is your mama a llama? I asked my friend Frederick.”}
- Don José: A poco, no me digas que la huerca ya sabe leer? {Really, don’t tell me that the kid already knows how to read?}
- Nora: Casi, apá, casi. {Almost, dad, almost.} Actually she knows this story de memoria {by heart} because I have to read it to her almost every night.
- Mary: Well, that doesn’t matter, believe me, she is well on her way to reading.
- Eva: “No, no la es, me contestó Federico con el pico.” {“No, she’s not, answered Frederick with his beak.”}
- Don José: Ay qué huerca tan chula, tan lista, tan letrada. ¿Vas a ser maestra como tu amá? {Oh, what a beautiful, bright, educated kid. Are you going to be a teacher like your mom?}
- Eva: Sí, papi. Voy a ser maestra, una tícher como mi amá. {Yes, grandpa. I am going to be a teacher, a teacher like my mom.}

Don José: Chingao, qué tan bonita es la vida, qué tan bonita. {Damn, how beautiful life is, how beautiful it is.} [He wipes the tears out of the corner of his eyes.]

Don José, who never had the opportunity to learn how to read or write, did all that he could to insure that his own children would not suffer the same fate. It did not matter to him how many strawberries he had to pick. He is still as dedicated. Every time he goes to the U.S., he always brings a book back for his granddaughter, which he selects by the pictures, rather than the words.

Emotional costs

Although their parents used their financial resources to combat institutional barriers in Mexico and were willing to pay for tutors if necessary, there was little they could do to ease the emotional toll that the transition cost their children. In describing their transition from one education system to another, the participants often began to tear up.

Laura stated that she spoke English at home almost all of the time. She was the third child of four. In the U.S., it is quite common for the younger children in the family to have a less developed speaking ability in Spanish than the older children because they tend to use English when interacting with older siblings who have already begun attending school in English. Laura's parents, while they did not speak very much English at the time, understood quite a bit. They did not require their children to use Spanish with them, in part, because communication was not a problem within the family. Her father only began to worry about Laura's Spanish just before the family decided to return to Mexico.

Laura: I mean like, my dad tried to help me before we moved here. He would punish me, you know, to read. And he would bring me these books and he goes, "I want you to read this because when I come back from work I'm going to ask you." I would cry because I didn't even know how. I mean my dad did that I think because reading was the only thing he really knew about in Spanish. I mean he didn't have much education, but he knew how to read. And I would cry a lot. But yet, I mean I thank my dad a lot about that. I'm not like my brother, why did you do that? It was hard though and when we first moved here of course they put me down one year because I didn't know Spanish good. So I did fourth grade twice, remember? And I had a tutor. A really good tutor, I think. She taught me real good.

Laura's father tried as best he could to prepare Laura academically for the transition while the family was still in Colorado. Having her read in Spanish was the only thing he could do because he had had so few years of schooling in Mexico. Once in Mexico, he soon hired a tutor for his children. Yet despite her fathers' efforts, Laura describes her first year of schooling in Mexico as traumatic.

Laura: When I was in school, when we first got here, it was like, everybody would ask me, how do you say this in English and how do you say that? Me hacían la pocha because I was, well my speaking was not really fluent at all. Y la pocha esa y la pocha otra I hated it so much because yo era como la conejilla de la india....era como un experimento....That's how I felt. And I wouldn't like it porque me trataba como una cosa rara, y díme y díme. Y no me gustaba que me preguntara ¿cómo se dice?...I'm like, okay here, I'm trying to get used to a different school, different country, different language and you're making me all these questions. I mean, I felt terrible. Why? Because I didn't have control of my situation. They're attacking me, like they're attacking me in Spanish and I can't, I can't bitch out in Spanish. I couldn't do that in Spanish. I mean if they would talk to me in English that would be perfect for me. I mean, me defendía, but I was like trapped and everybody's asking me things in Spanish... and

everybody's just there, you know, like they have me, hold me against the wall. It was like, y ya no me pregunten, ya déjenme. If you ask me someone that I remember from that first school, I would say no one. But they remember me....But I don't want to remember anyone from that school. {When I was in school, when we first got here, it was like, everybody would asked me, how do say this in English and how do you say that? They made me a pocha because I was, well my speaking was not really fluent at all. And the pocha this and the pocha that. I hated it so much because I was like a guinea pig.... it was like an experiment....That's how I felt.... And I wouldn't like it because they treated me like a strange thing and tell me and tell me. And I would, I wouldn't like it when they asked me how to say things.... I'm like, okay here, I'm trying to get used to a different school, different country, different language and you're making me all these questions....I felt terrible. Why? Because I didn't have control of my situation. They're attacking me, like they're attacking me in Spanish and I can't, I can't bitch out in Spanish. I couldn't do that in Spanish. I mean if they would talk to me in English that would be perfect for me. I mean, I would have defended myself. But I was like trapped and everybody's asking me things in Spanish... and everybody's just there, you know, like they have me, hold me against the wall. It was like, and just stop asking me questions, just leave me alone. If you ask me someone that I remember from that first school, I would say no one. But they remember me....But I don't want to remember anyone from that school.}

Twenty years after the fact, it still makes her cry just to talk about it. Laura understood Spanish because her parents spoke Spanish to her, but she could not speak it well. She describes the language barriers she faced as “attacks” in which she was unable to defend herself. Laura really does not remember a single classmate, nor even her teacher, from the first school she attended. They only

thing she does remember is that she felt like a caged animal who could not escape. Laura survived, however, and completed more schooling than her older brother. He eventually dropped out of *prepa* and returned to the U.S.

The emotional trauma caused by the transition is also evident in the fact that Laura rapidly switches back and forth between English and Spanish while telling the above story. She normally tends not to code-switch, at least not in her own home, because she says that her husband “hates it.” Her husband stated as much when he attended a surprise birthday party for me at one of the transnational’s homes where code-switching is the norm rather than the exception. Of course, there is strength in numbers, and while Laura merely rolled her eyes, Nora laughingly told him, “We use English para que aprendas {so that you’ll learn}, Eddie.”

Nora described a very painful transition. However, in contrast to Laura, Nora was an adolescent, which made the transition even more difficult. It is impossible to adequately describe the wavering of Nora’s voice during this interview. I recorded in my fieldnotes that as she continued talking about this time in her life, she twisted herself into a little ball in the corner of the couch. I asked her several times if she wanted to stop or if she wanted me to turn off the tape, but she said no. At one point, I think we were both crying.

Nora: It was really hard, so, so hard. I think, as I said I was shyer, shy, but I got more shy when I came to Mexico because, as I said, my Spanish wasn’t so good.... I will always remember that here in Mexico, they use, you know whenever you refer to someone older or respect you say Ud. And I didn’t use that. I used tú. So, here I am talking to the teachers in tú ...then I guess this got around the little small school that I was this new person, like an

extraterrestrial thing, coming from Mars, and they were asking me, “Oh you are Nora, the one that calls the teachers tú.” So like, I was like, they tagged me, you know, me tiquetaron {tagged me} with that. Oh you’re the Nora that disrepects the teachers...And I was so embarrassed that I just stopped talking. I got even with them. I just stopped talking ever....I didn’t talk at school at all.

Like Laura, Nora experienced language related difficulties when she returned to Mexico. It was not that she did not understand the language nor that she could not make herself understood. When Nora spoke of not knowing Spanish well, most of the problems she describes, (including the one above), are related to the cultural rules of usage. Nora knew Spanish well enough, but she did not know how to use Spanish in school in Mexico because she had only ever spoken it at home in California. Nora found a solution to her language problems: she simply stopped speaking in any language at all.

The difficulties Nora experienced were not only confined to culturally appropriate language usage. As an adolescent, she faced a different set of problems that Laura never had to face.

Nora: I know that in the States, they say that there is a lot of racism and discrimination, but it wasn’t as bad for me there like it was here.... I was discriminated against bad. Like people in school would not want to like have a friendship with me because I was from the United States and people from the United States to their opinion are like crazy, you know, they smoke pot and you know, they get laid. And these people had never even been over there. And even though I was a very serious person and everything. And I never did anything bad in the States or here. I felt very discriminated, very discriminated, but I guess I just got used to people not inviting me here or there because they thought I was a bad influence.

Because she came from the U.S., it was immediately assumed that Nora was a juvenile delinquent with loose morals who was to be avoided. I lived next door to Nora for a year and nothing could be further from the truth. According to Nora, this stereotype is still very much alive. She has seen her own transnational students treated as pariahs because they transfer into *prepa* from schools in the U.S.

Carely never really talks in terms having “lost” her Spanish or of not speaking Spanish well when she came back to Mexico, which is consistent with her pattern of immigration. She lived in Mexico and attended kindergarten there before moving to the U.S. for first through fifth grade. As stated previously, she does not remember having any difficulties making the transition from Mexico to the U.S. She attributes this to the efforts of her aunt and uncle, who enforced an almost “English only” policy in the home the summer before she started school, and to the fact that she had one year of bilingual education. In this way, her U.S. school did not seem “foreign” to her. She does, however, mention that the day to day aspects of Mexican schools were “foreign” to her when she returned which caused her a great deal of stress.

Carely: God, it was awful when I first got back. Horrible porque no entendí nada... Like how to do school in Mexico. Por ejemplo, the first day I asked mi maestra where the pencil sharpener was because I didn't see one hanging from the wall. She told me to borrow one if I didn't have my own. And she was mean about it. Like, duh, didn't you bring one? But it was new to me, not having a pencil sharpener on the wall or even there not being any toilet paper in the bathrooms. I mean mi abuelita, la nueva, put a folded up

bunch of toilet paper in my backpack, but I didn't know or no me di cuenta that I was supposed to take paper with me when I went to the bathroom. Oh, y todo eso de dictado. Like here in Mexico, it is really common for the teacher to read things off for you word for word and you have to copy it down, just like she says it. And she says la puntuación también. Like, "En los bosques tropicales del Yucatán, hay muchos animales raros: el jaguar, el quetzal", and like that. Well, first of all, I didn't know about dictados because we never had to do them over there. And so I remember the first one I did, I wrote down "dos puntos" instead of putting two dots on top of each other. So the teacher made fun of me and asked me how I made it to the sixth grade without knowing algo de puntuación. I was so embarrassed, but I didn't say nothing. So the next time we did it, I put down, there was this punto y coma thing. So I put down, ". y ," thinking que ya agarré la onda. But it still wasn't right. And she made me stay in at recreo so I could copy it down right from her paper. And I had to do that like ten times. I remember that I came home crying and telling mi papi that I wasn't never going back to that school. Que la maestra me hacía la burra. So my grandpa got all mad and said he was going to talk to that teacher. I don't know if he ever did, but he paid a teacher to tutor me. And that was good because I could ask her questions about school and I couldn't ask my grandpa because he never went to school. But it was so hard for me in the beginning. Just getting used to how things are done in school in Mexico. {God, it was awful when I first got back. Horrible because I didn't understand anything.... Like how to do school in Mexico. For example, the first day I asked my teacher where the pencil sharpener was because I didn't see one hanging from the wall. She told me to borrow one if I didn't have my own. And she was mean about it. Like, duh, didn't you bring one? But it was new to me, not having a pencil sharpener on the wall or even there not being any toilet paper in the bathrooms. I mean my grandmother, the new one, put a folded up bunch of toilet paper in my backpack, but I didn't know or I didn't realize I was supposed to take paper with me when I went to the bathroom. Oh, and all this about dictation. Like here in Mexico, it is really common for the teacher to read things off for you word for

word and you have to copy it down, just like she says it. And she says the punctuation too. Like, “In the tropical forests of Yucatan, here are many rare animals: the jaguar, the quetzal,” and like that. Well first of all, I didn’t know about dictados because we never had to do them over there. And so I remember the first one I did, I wrote down “colon” instead of putting two dots on top of each other. So the teacher made fun of me and asked me how I made it to sixth grade without knowing something about punctuation. I was so embarrassed, but I didn’t say nothing. So the next time we did it, I put down, there was this semicolon thing. So I put down, “. and,” thinking that I had already caught on. But it still wasn’t right. And she made me stay in at recess so I could copy it down right from her paper. And I had to do that like ten times. I remember that I came home crying and telling my grandpa that I wasn’t never going back to that school. That the teacher made me a dunce. So my grandpa got all mad and said he was going to talk to that teacher. I don’t know if he ever did, but he paid a teacher to tutor me. That was good because I could ask her questions about school and I couldn’t ask my grandpa because he never went to school. But it was so hard for me in the beginning. Just getting used to how things are done in school in Mexico.}

As the above passage illustrates, Carely’s transition problems stemmed from her lack of familiarity with both the school setting and classroom activities. She expected there to be a classroom pencil sharpener and toilet paper in the bathroom. Carely had never done a dictation exercises in the U.S. and to this day she remembers word for word the sentences in which she made mistakes. This lack of familiarity with schooling practices, in combination with her teacher’s lack of understanding, made Carely not want to even return to school. Although her grandfather was unable to help her because he had never attended school, he was able to pay a teacher to help Carely learn “how to do school” in Mexico.

Lidia's experience is similar to Carely's. Lidia said that her grades suffered in Mexico when she returned after three years in the U.S. because she was not used to the "way they teach over here." She did not mention this as a problem the first time she changed school systems: Head Start-kindergarten in the U.S. to first and second grade in Mexico. However, the second time (third through sixth grade in the U.S. to the first two years of *secundaria* in Mexico), her lack of familiarity with pedagogical practices caused her problems.

Lidia: The hardest thing for me was like all the memorizing you have to do here. Like I bombed a lot of tests in the beginning because I didn't know that I was suppose to machetear palabra por palabra lo que dice la maestra o el libro {memorize word for word what the teacher or the book said}. And exams count a lot more over here. And that was hard. I think there is a lot less memorizing over there. I mean I studied for exams over there too. I mean, I have always tried to be a good student wherever I am. But like here I didn't know that I was supposed to memorize the exact words in the book. So I got like sevens and even a couple of sixes here, which is like C's and D's over there and like I always got mostly B's and some A's over there. So that kind of pissed me off, but you know, I got used to it. And I just do what I have to do.

Lidia was not prepared for a focus on rote learning and exam centered grading practices. She attributes her drop in grades to her not understanding teaching practices in Mexico. Her drop in grades made her very angry, but she adapted, which is very typical of her.

In contrast to the other participants, Lidia never described re-entry into Mexican schools as being particularly traumatic or having taken an emotional toll. She is also the participant who has made the most back and forth movement,

which may explain the relative ease with which she seems to adapt. In the following excerpt, Lidia is talking about how she sees herself in relation to Mexico and the U.S. It illustrates the pattern of change that has become very much a part of her.

Lidia: I guess I am not just from here or there, I'm both from here and there. That doesn't sound too good, but it is. It really is. I like being in both places. And I think it is good to be from both places. Like I see the world or life bigger than just Americans or just Mexicans see it. And really, I can live here or I can live there. It doesn't really matter that much. But I can't live there without coming here de vez en cuando {sometimes} and I can't live here without going there sometimes. Así es la onda. Y de veras, toda mi familia es así. {That's the way it is. And really, my whole family is like that.}

MEXICO TO U.S.

Institutional barriers

I have discussed some of the institutional practices of U.S. schools in Chapter Five: Race/ethnicity as a inescapable in U.S. schools. While some of the institutional practices I describe below certainly relate to issues of race and ethnicity; these participants do not necessarily describe them as such. Therefore, I have chosen to include them this section, rather than the aforementioned section on race and ethnicity.

Overall, participants talk more about the transition into Mexican than into U.S. schools. This is a result of several factors. First, it is a function of their particular transnational experience. Laura, Carely and Nora went into Mexican

schools from U.S. schools. Although they would return to the U.S. to work or visit, they did not return as students. Second, they began school in the U.S. quite young, so the memory of any problems they had when they made the transition from a “Mexican” home in the U.S. to a U.S. school are apt to be less vivid. Carely is the only one who remembers not knowing English very well when she started school. Nora and Laura state that there was never a time when they did not speak English. Finally, all of these participants are living in Mexico. Therefore, the battles they are fighting were Mexican battles. In a sense, this context serves to determine “where the grass is greener.” If they had been living in the U.S., their views might have taken on a different hue. This is certainly the case when Laura talked about her son’s experiences in the U.S.

When I met Laura, her family had recently returned from living in the U.S. for two years. She talked about an incident when her own son went from pre-K and kindergarten in Mexico into first and second grade in the U.S. In this incident, the school immediately tried to place her son into ESL pullout classes. Drawing upon her own experience in the U.S. as a child mentioned previously in the section of race/ethnicity, she fought this decision.

Laura: When we got over there and I took Eddie to school, they wanted to put him in like this ESL thing, they called it, where he would have a special class, like for English learners, and not be in the regular class for part of the time. Well, I wasn’t about to have that happen. So I told them, “No, you give me those ESL books and I will take care of his English at home.” I mean I knew there was nothing wrong with his English that a couple of months wouldn’t solve especially if I worked with him at home. I didn’t want him to be out of the regular class like I was. And they weren’t happy about it at first, but I think it helped that they

saw that I knew English. And that's what we did and Eddie was fine. I mean he understood everything in English already, he was just a little weak on speaking. And like reading, but he didn't know how to read in Spanish either yet. I mean, come one, he was going into the first grade. So how can you tell right away that a kid is going to have problems?

When school officials attempted to place Laura's son in a pull-out ESL class, she remembered being placed in a remedial pull-out class with "all Mexicans and Black kids." Consequently, she fought the move. I believe she was successful in part because school officials were not expecting someone who sounded like Laura. Little Eddie had a Mexican transcript which meant his mother was supposed to sound like a Mexican immigrant. Actually, they probably were not expecting her to fight back at all.

Lidia and Elvira are the only participants who made the transition from Mexican to U.S. schools. As mentioned previously, Lidia makes little reference to schooling problems on either side of the border. She is also the participant that made the most changes between schooling systems. She went from Head Start and kindergarten in the U.S. to first and second grade in Mexico. She then went back to the U.S. for third through sixth grade and returned to Mexico for two years of *secundaria* in the same *colegio* she had attended previously. Finally, she completed ninth through twelfth grade in the U.S., graduating in 1999. She never discussed language as being problematic for her. However, she mentioned a situation similar to that of Laura's experience with her son, in that Lidia was placed into ESL pullout classes in the third grade.

Lidia: I get back for third grade and they put me in this like ESL remedial thing. And I remember being angry, like why were they putting me with all these kids that didn't know English. I mean, I never stopped speaking English when I was in Mexico. I still talked to my sisters a lot of the time in English. And here they go and put me with kids that didn't know boo...Probably, some principal or counselor or whoever makes those decisions just took one look at the Mexican transcript and said, "Yep, ESL." I mean I think they did the same thing in Mexico when they tried to bump me and Marta back grades. Like they didn't bother to see what we knew, they just saw U.S. and said, "Yep, make them repeat grades."

Mary: So did your parents do anything? I mean in Mexico they put you in private school so you wouldn't have to repeat grades. Did they try to get you out of ESL?

Lidia: Oh God no.... Maybe they would now. I mean you have to understand my parents. They never went to school for very long even in Mexico. But they knew that the government was crap in Mexico. So they trusted Mexico less. But like over there, I mean, for real, they must have seen these schools that are all pretty compared to Mexico. And they feed kids lunch for free and all that. And they thought the government was doing a good job. So the schools must know what they are doing. I mean I remember complaining about it, but they were just like, "Vamos a ver que pasa." Like they had more faith in the government in the U.S. than they did in Mexico. Of course, I'm talking about back then. I think both my parents know now that the government is crap over there too. But they still tend to see it as a better class of crap. Don't get me wrong, they love Turco, just like I love Turco, but that doesn't mean they love the government. Because really, the government here doesn't do nothing for you, it doesn't help you at all. Now I don't think the government over there does much either, but my parents do because they compare it to what they know in Mexico.

Like my dad still thinks Social Security is the bomb. Can you believe that?

Lidia did not understand the reasoning behind placed in ESL because she continued speaking English in Mexico. Although Lidia resented being pulled from the regular classroom, her parents did not balk at this as they did when they were told she and her sister would have to repeat grades in Mexico. Lidia believes her parents were less involved in the U.S. because they trusted schools to do the right thing. They did not have the same level of trust in Mexico.

Lidia also went back into a U.S. high school in ninth grade after attending two years of *secundaria* in Mexico. She views the institutional structure of high school as problematic and has strong opinions on the subject.

Lidia: I think high schools over there are too big. Like they should call them a teen warehouse or maybe Sam's Club for Teens. Attention students, Sam's Club is now offering a student pep rally in aisle five... I think that it is easy to get lost in high school. Like Mexican prepas are better that way. No son tan grandes {they are not so big} and you stay with the same class all the time. Like there might be three or four first year classes of forty instead of one huge freshman class. So you get to know people, like who you can ask for help en qué materia {what subject}. High schools are too, are so big, you're a number, not a person.... it is easy to get lost in the shuffle unless you are pushy. I'm pushy, bien chingona {really tough}, so it wasn't a huge problem for me.

Lidia views the sheer size of high school as dehumanizing. In such an environment, students are apt to lose their way. She prefers the cohort system of Mexican *prepas* because it enables students to form closer bonds and share their

talents. Of course, Lidia did not see herself as affected by this, or rather she did not let herself be affected by it.

Lidia has a very forceful personality, which she believes has enabled her to fight her way through the depersonalizing environment of an enormous high school.

Lidia: Like when I first got back, they had me scheduled for like general math or garbage like that. I went right to the counselor's office and told them that I already knew how to add and subtract, thank you very much, I wanted algebra. And then they give you this line about how they would see what they could do and to come back tomorrow. Ha! and they say Mexicanos siempre dicen mañana, mañana {Mexican's always say tomorrow, tomorrow}. Ha! Well, I told them that tomorrow wasn't good enough and that I was going to college and I needed algebra. Like I said, I have always been a good student. And I am not going to let anybody push me around. And that's how I managed to get the classes I wanted. But you gotta know the system, plan ahead and be pushy otherwise you get lost. If you're clueless, you're gonna stay clueless.

Instead of allowing herself to be tracked into basic education courses, Lidia demanded college prep classes. A less forceful student might have accepted the "come back tomorrow" attitude of the guidance counselors, but Lidia knew what she wanted and did not let anyone deter her. Of course, Lidia was not completely alone in this process of negotiating her path through this "teen warehouse." She mentioned that she has an older brother, David, who was attending a junior college at the time. This brother was instrumental in helping her plan ahead because he knew what classes she needed to take in order to be

able to go to college. In this way, she relied upon family resources to ensure her success, rather than accepting the path school officials had initially chosen for her.

Like Lidia, Elvira attended high school in the U.S. She went from first through *secundaria* in Mexican schools in the isolated rural area where she was born, and then attended tenth through twelve grade in a Central Texas city, graduating in the class of 2001. Although she had made frequent visits to this Central Texas city to visit family members when she was a child, she had never lived there for more than a month or two at a time before deciding to attend high school there. This city could be described as a somewhat rural city of approximately 65,000 people, with obviously nowhere near the degree of urbanization as Lidia experienced in Chicago. However, the high school Elvira attended does currently have an enrollment of about 3000 students.

Elvira: What was really hard about over there was the high school was so big. Like I couldn't believe it when I got there. Like I felt lost. I didn't know nothing, like where to go, or stuff like that. Maybe that's why Mexicanos de allá, Chicanos, get into so much trouble. Porque se pierden en escuelas tan grandes... I think they should change them. Make them más como las primarias allá. I like las primarias allá. Son mucho más chiquitas. Las primarias de mis sobrinos están bien bonitas. {What was really hard about over there was the high school was so big. Like I couldn't believe it when I got there. Like I felt lost. I didn't know nothing, like where to go, or stuff like that. Maybe that's why Mexicans over there, Chicanos, get into so much trouble. Because they lose their way in such big schools. I think they should change them. Make them more like the elementary schools over there. I like the elementary schools over there. They are much smaller. My nieces' and nephews' elementary schools are very pretty.}

Elvira, like Lidia, described the sheer size of her U.S. high school to as a barrier. However, in contrast to Lidia, she could not depend on the advice of her older siblings because, although Elvira had two older brothers and four older sisters working in the same area, none had ever attended school in the U.S. Yet her complaint about the size of U.S. high schools echoed Lidia's. In such large high schools, students are apt to get lost.

Like Lidia, Elvira had problems with at least one of the classes in which she was automatically placed: Spanish I. It was not that she was bothered by having to take Spanish. Initially, she thought of it as a sort of safe haven, a refuge from all English classes. However, less than a week after she began school there, she tried to get moved to a higher level.

Elvira: They put me in Spanish I. At first, I thought that maybe it would be good, you know, to have one class where I understood everything, pero {but} after a couple of days, I could hardly stand it. It was so boring. I even tried to change, but they wouldn't let me.

Mary: Who is they? Tell me what happened.

Elvira: The counselors. I went to see them. They told me I could take French I or German I, pero {but} it was enough with just one extra language, English.

Mary: How many levels of Spanish were there in your high school?

Elvira: Four

Mary: Did you ask to move a level or two?

Elvira: Yeah, pero me dijeron que no, que así es. Es para los credits. Tienes que llevarlos así y no puedes brincarte. No es justo, yo sé. Y no aprendí nada, ni en Spanish I, ni en Spanish II. {Yeah, but they told me no, that that's the way it is. It has to do with credits. You have to take them like that and you can't jump ahead. It's not fair, I know. And I didn't learn anything, not in Spanish I, or in Spanish II.}

Unfortunately, Elvira was not as successful as Lidia. My sense was that Elvira did not know the system as well as Lidia did, and as a result was more willing to accept what the counselors said. As a former high school Spanish teacher, I find it hard to believe that moving up in the sequence is not allowed. While high schools may require two years of a “foreign” language for graduation, I have never heard of a high school that specifies that those two years must be at beginning levels. Elvira is certainly correct; it is not fair.

Emotional costs

As stated previously, only two of the participants transferred from Mexico into U.S. schools: Elvira and Lidia. Lidia never talks about being sad or having difficulty adjusting once when she came to the U.S. from Mexico, other than a brief mention of being angry at being placed in ESL classes in third grade or general math in high school. I believe there are several reasons for this. First, my relationship with Lidia did not have a chance to develop as it did with my

participants. Lidia returned to the U.S. about four months into this study. Second, Lidia's life has involved a series of transitions back and forth. Adaptability is part of who she is as a person. In a sense, she has learned to thrive in an environment where crossing borders is to be expected. Finally, Lidia prides herself on being a fighter. Any weakness, emotional or otherwise, is not something she would readily admit to.

Initially, Elvira did express some degree of emotional distress upon entering U.S. schools. She felt very isolated and very alone at least in the beginning.

Elvira: It was awful at first, I felt lost. Oh my gosh, when got home and I started crying with my sister. I was like, no, I don't want to go back to school. No me gusta estar sola ahí. {I don't like being alone there.} I want to go back to Mexico....That happened to me like, three times. And that was it.

I had expected to hear more from Elvira about how awful it was for her in the U.S., in part because Elvira makes it known that she does not particularly like the U.S. However, that did not happen even as our relationship deepened. If anything, she became less critical.

Commonsense says that pain lessens with time, but I think in the case of Elvira, the emotional trauma she had to endure became worth it with time because going to school in the U.S. has enabled her to stay and make a living in Mexico. It is important to remember that in the area where Elvira is living, there are almost no jobs. Many people have been forced to immigrate to the U.S., or to migrate internally to large cities in Mexico. All but one of Elvira's siblings has ended up

working in the U.S. This is the path Elvira was going to take. She was about to leave for the U.S. in order to work when she landed a job teaching English. She began with just two classes of English and now she is teaching thirteen classes and making a great salary by area standards. Certainly, her siblings in the U.S. make more money. However, Elvira has a “white collar” job that comes with respect in Mexico, which is worth far more than the emotional costs of attending high school in the U.S. or any salary she would earn in the U.S. At the end of our time together, Elvira had the following to say about her three years of schooling in the U.S.

Elvira: Gracias a estar allá, tengo mi trabajo. Aprendí bien el inglés y ya tengo mi trabajo. Cuando fui a Estados Unidos hace un mes, mi hermana me dijo, “Quédate aquí a trabajar, te pagan más aquí.” “¿Dónde?”, le dije. “En Luby’s²⁶ conmigo,” me dijo. “No way. No way”, I says, “Ya estoy acostumbrado de estar atrás de un escritorio. Ya no puedo.” {Thanks to being over there, I have my job. I learned English well and I have my job already. When I went to the U.S. a month ago, my sister said, “Stay here and work, they pay you more here.” “Where?” I said. “In Luby’s with me,” she told me. “No way. No way,” I says, “I am already used to being behind a desk. I can’t do that anymore.”}

Elvira is now engaged and has informed her fiancé that they will be living in the U.S. for a few years so that their children will have the opportunity to learn English well. Of course, she wants them to attend one of those really pretty elementary schools rather than high school.

²⁶ Luby’s is a cafeteria. Elvira’s sister is a cook there.

CONCLUSION

Institutional barriers existed on both sides of the border which stood in the way of the schooling success of these transnational participants. In Mexico, delays in validating transcripts and moving children back a grade level threatened the academic progress of my participants. However, their parents were able to surmount these obstacles with the money they had earned in the U.S. by hiring tutors and placing their children in private schools. In the U.S., automatic placement into ESL, the system of tracking, and the massive size of high schools were problematic. In general, their immigrant parents were less able to help them breach these walls.

The emotional costs of these transitions between school worlds were considerable. Most participants have extremely painful memories of this time period. Transferring between schools is difficult for most children; transferring between schools located in two different countries is doubly difficult. The change in language, negative stereotypes and differences in schooling practices make school difficult to negotiate. For the most part, their parents could provide little relief to them. However, regardless of which side of the border they were on, it is obvious that the parents of these participants cared a great deal about both the academic success and emotional well-being of their children.

CHAPTER 7: LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL ISSUES.

Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente. We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestizaje*, the subject of your *burla*.

Gloria Anzaldúa (1999, p. 80)

In this chapter, I describe the linguistic and cultural abilities of these participants and the themes that emerged around being essentially tri-lingual and transcultural in Mexico. The first three sections deal with their language proficiency. First, I describe my participants' Spanish proficiency. Then, I discuss their English proficiency and the continuing contact or renewal of the language they experience as a result of their transnational ties. I conclude with a discussion of Spanglish as the language of transnationalism and the conflicting, multi-faceted attitudes which these transnationals have towards Spanglish. I use the term "Spanglish" because this is how my participants refer to the phenomenon of code-switching between Spanish and English and the borrowing of English words and phrases and transforming them into Spanish.

In the fourth section, I describe the favorable social environment in which my participants are located in Mexico as it pertains to English. In the fifth section, I go on to describe their experiences as heritage language students in their English classes in Mexican schools. The value of English as cultural capital in

the world of work as teachers of English is discussed in the sixth section. I provide a glimpse into the classrooms of these transnational teachers of English in section seven. Finally, I describe how and why these participants seek to transmit their English and transcultural knowledge on to their children or future children. A summary the key points discussed in this chapter is provided at the end.

SPANISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Certainly, all of these transnational individuals demonstrate a native proficiency in Spanish. They display an educated, rural form of Spanish which seems to be characteristic of this particular area. All have far exceeded their parents' educational levels. Only one of the parents of these participants even completed elementary school in Mexico. In contrast, all of these participants have completed a terminal degree in secondary school education, whether that be *prepa* in Mexico or high school in the U.S. All, except Elvira, have completed additional study beyond the secondary school level. In Spanish, they sound like their educated, rural colleagues.

I call this educated, rural Spanish for a couple of reasons. First, both my participants and their educated, rural colleagues display language characteristics that I had always been taught, in my Spanish classes in the U.S., to believe were either elements of “uneducated, campesino” Spanish, or the “uneducated, deviant” Spanish of Chicanos in the U.S. It has also been documented in the literature as such (Riegelhaupt & Carrasco, 2000; Galindo, 1993, 1996; Hidalgo, 1987a, 1987b, 1993; R. Sánchez, 1993). For example, the addition of an “s” in the

second person preterit form, such as *fuistes* or *hablastes* (*fuiste, hablaste* in the preterit tense according to prescriptive grammar verb conjugations), is one such element which seems to be “standard” in the speech of these educated, rural individuals. This does not appear to be the norm among the educated, urban individuals I came into contact with in Monterrey.

Second, there is evidence that these participants use other elements of this “uneducated, deviant, campesino” Spanish only with their parents or those family members with little formal schooling. For example, Nora frequently uses verb forms such as *haiga* (*haya*, in the present subjunctive form according to prescriptive grammar verb conjugations) and *traiba* (*traía*, in the imperfect form according to prescriptive grammar verb conjugations). However, she only uses such forms with her father or with distant family members who are subsistence farmers on an *ejido*.

All participants appear to write competently in Spanish and easily accomplish the written tasks required in daily life. Lidia, Carely, Nora and Laura, who had experienced the transition from U.S. schools to Mexican schools, noted that they needed at least a year in what was essentially a Spanish language immersion environment before they actually felt comfortable writing in Spanish. Accordingly, their Mexican report cards indicate low grades in Spanish during the initial transition period of a year or so, but after that their grades were average or above average. Nora and Carely write academic papers for their education classes without any difficulty, although Nora appears to favor a style of writing which she asserts comes from English.

Nora: I read a lot more in English than I do in Spanish. And Spanish writing, I don't know, it seems so flowery. Like just get to the point already.... So my writing in Spanish is more to the point, less flowery.

Her direct style of writing does not seem to affect her grades in her education classes. I never saw any of her papers receive a grade lower than an 8 (*B-*); most were 9's and 10's (*A-* and *A*).

With respect to their reading in Spanish, Carely and Nora have a small number of education manuals in Spanish from their classes. I saw newspapers in Spanish in all of my participants' homes, but only one or two books and no magazines. Most of the participants do have some bilingual Spanish/English children's books, which have in many cases been purchased used at flea markets and garage sales in the U.S. They have acquired these books for use with their own children. As I will illustrate later, there are far more books and magazines in English in their homes than in Spanish. The relative absence of reading materials in Spanish may be related to their relatively high price in Mexico. For example, a paperback novel in Spanish I purchased in Monterrey cost the equivalent of \$15 U.S dollars. Lack of access may also be a factor. There is one bookstore in Lerdo and one in Montemayor, but neither has more than a half a dozen leisure type or non-academic books. Most of these are self-help books. Their inventory consists primarily of educational texts such as computer manuals. There are no used books for sale in the local market stalls. Other outlets in these areas, like grocery or corner stores, offer little more than newspapers and a couple of tabloid publications. There are very small public libraries in both Lerdo and

Montemayor, but the books cannot be checked out. There are no bookstores or libraries in Turco or in Rancho del Valle. Leisure reading material is available in Mexico; there are many bookstores in Monterrey. However, in these rural areas of Nuevo Leon, there appears to be very little in the way of leisure reading materials in Spanish and these participants do not go to Monterrey very often. Therefore, it is not surprising that these participants have few reading materials in Spanish.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

I believe it is important to summarize my participants' years of contact with English in the U.S. and years of schooling in the U.S., as well as the ongoing development and renewal of English these participants experience in Mexico as a result of their transnational ties. In this way, I hope to provide a general sense of the level of English proficiency these participants possess. Although an impossible task, I want to the reader to "hear" these participants in English as I have heard them in English.

Nora was born in the U.S. and attended there school from kindergarten through the eighth grade. She completed *primaria*, *secundaria* and *prepa* through public and private adult education programs in Mexico and completed a three year degree at a private secretarial school. Then, at age 19, she returned to the U.S. to work for two years. After returning to live in Mexico, she completed three years of a business degree, and is currently working on a degree in education. Nora has

been living in Mexico full-time for approximately seventeen years, although she visits her siblings in the U.S. several times a year.

Carely attended school from first through fifth grade in the U.S. and sixth grade through *prepa* in Mexico. She is currently studying for a degree in education. Carely has been living in Mexico for the past ten years. She visits relatives in the U.S. several times a year.

Elvira has had extensive visits to the U.S. beginning at age five. She completed first grade through *secundaria* in Mexico and then attended three years of high school in Texas. She had just returned to Mexico after graduating from high school when this study began. She visited her siblings in the U.S. twice during the time I was conducting this study.

Lidia attended Head Start and kindergarten in the U.S., first and second grade in Mexico, third through sixth grade in the U.S., two years of *secundaria* in Mexico and finally ninth through twelve grade and one year of community college in the U.S. Lidia had been living in Mexico for approximately two years; she returned to the U.S. to re-enroll in college a few months after I began this study.

Laura had attended kindergarten through fourth grade in the U.S. and fifth through *prepa* plus one year of secretarial school in Mexico. She has lived and worked in the U.S. off and on for the past ten years. Laura had been living in Mexico for approximately one year when this study began.

It is important to note that while I have briefly described their continuing visits to the U.S., I have not provided information regarding the number of visits

to Mexico made by their relatives in the U.S. Needless to say, these comings and goings are quite frequent. During these visits, Spanglish, English, and Spanish are used in the home, although Spanglish appears to predominate.

None of my participants speak what would be considered a “prestige” variety of English in the U.S. Carely, Nora, and Laura frequently speak what is called “Chicano English” in the U.S. For example, the prosodic features of their English often resemble that of Spanish. Lidia has an extremely strong working class Chicago accent in English; for example the “d” sound almost completely replaces the “th” sound at the beginning of words. Given my familiarity with Chicago, I knew where she was from and her class background the moment she started speaking English. Elvira has an incredibly strong Texas drawl; one that I have never heard on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin, even from my students who are from the same area where Elvira attended high school. Of course, these students are overwhelmingly Anglo and from upper middle class families, which in itself may serve to illustrate the class/racial position of Elvira in Texas. The spoken English of most of these participants bears the influence of Spanish. For example, they usually say, “got married with” rather than “got married to” because the preposition which accompanies this structure in Spanish is “with” not “to.”

These transnationals display a high degree of oral proficiency and can talk to me about almost anything in English. They have no difficulty understanding television programs in English which they watch regularly because each of their homes has either a satellite dish or Direct TV. Judging by their homes and self-

reports, they frequently read English books and magazines that they either buy themselves when they go to the U.S. or that their relatives in U.S. acquire for them. Laura likes reading women's magazines. She had stacks of *Ladies Home Journal* and *Weekly Women's World*, among others, because her sister-in-law in Texas buys them for herself and then passes them on to Laura. Nora reads romance novels and back issues of *National Geographic*, which she or her brothers buy used in the U.S. Carely and Elvira love reading *Seventeen* and *Harlequin Romances*, which are given to them by their relatives in the U.S. Lidia enjoys murder mysteries, which she buys by the dozen at flea markets in Chicago. In addition to the bilingual children's books mentioned previously, the participants with children have children's books in English which have been purchased at garage sales and flea markets for use with their own children. It is obvious to me and to them that their transnational connections provide them with a great deal of leisure reading material in English.

Elvira: I learned to read in Spanish, but I learned to love to read in English. There is just a whole lot more to read over there than there is here. So I always bring stuff back to Mexico to read.

As Elvira's comments illustrate, my participants simply have greater access to reading materials in English than Spanish because of their transnational ties.

I frequently saw the writing in English they produce in their role as English teachers. While it is basic, rather than formally academic, because of the level at which they are teaching, most demonstrate the ability to correct the

academic writing produced by their supervisors and education professionals who had learned English as a foreign language in Mexico. As Nora stated when she showed me a passage from an English manual being compiled for use at one of her schools, “This doesn’t make any sense in English. You have to translate it into Spanish to be able to understand it.” She was correct, and her revision of it was on target.

I read Elvira’s “essay,” which is a part of the screening process for employment as an English teacher. Essay is rather a misnomer in English, as Elvira herself realized. Before beginning to write Elvira, who had just graduated from a Texas high school, asked me, “It says here ‘write an essay’. Do you mean like a TAAS essay?”, referring to a standardized test in Texas. I did not have the answer, and asked the supervisor who informed me she meant “uno o dos parrafitos” {one or two little paragraphs}. Elvira’s “parrafitos” were very comprehensible, and her high school records show that she did in fact pass the exit level TAAS her senior year.

SPANGLISH

In general, my participants use the term *Spanglish* to refer to the mixing of Spanish and English, whether that be in the form of code-switching between Spanish and English or borrowing English words or phrases and transforming them into Spanish. Lidia also uses the term *españolés* on occasion, but it does not appear to be a very common term in this area of Mexico. When I heard Spanish monolinguals and English as a foreign language individuals in Nuevo Leon refer

to code-switching and borrowing, they most frequently used the terms *hablar mocho* or *hablar pocho*; both of which would best be translated by the phrase “to speak Americanized Spanish.” All of these transnationals speak Spanglish in varying degrees, depending upon to whom they are speaking. As mentioned previously, Spanglish appears to be the language of choice whenever relatives are visiting from the U.S.

Among some of my participants, there tends to be a lot of good natured joking about language in general and Spanglish in particular. For example, Nora takes great delight in recounting her daughter’s self-invented, developing Spanglish vocabulary. Exchanges such as the following are common in Nora’s home. This one occurred the first weekend I spent at Nora’s home before moving to Lerdo as Nora was scolding her three-year-old daughter.

Nora: Eva, get over here or I’m going to smack you.

Eva: Ay amá, no me esmaquees. {Oh, mom, don’t smack me.}

Nora: Did you hear that? She does that all the time, makes up words like that. I’m not talking about the ones she hears my brothers use like “Wátchale” {Watch out}, but when she turns what I say in English into Spanish. It always cracks me up. Isn’t that a riot?

Lidia goes so far as to say, “Spanglish is my language.” Nora and Lidia are by far the most accepting of Spanglish. Yet even they, along with the other participants, often voiced very contradictory views.

The participants are very aware that Spanglish is stigmatized in Mexico. Of course, it is stigmatized in the U.S. too. I got a sense that the use of Spanglish is strongly frowned upon in Mexico both from my discussions with education professionals and from Mexicans in general when I inadvertently used a common Spanglish word like *bus*. Several education officials or supervisors criticized these transnationals as teachers, claiming they use too much Spanish in the classroom. However, based on my classroom observations of non-transnationals and transnationals, I do not see a difference with respect to the total amount of Spanish used. The difference seems to be in the way Spanish and English are used in the classroom. Non-transnationals tend to translate from English to Spanish in a sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph manner, whereas transnationals tend to engage in intersentential code-switching with great frequency. When I questioned a particular education official about this further, she stated:

Pues, el problema es que los maestros mexicano-americanos cambian de un idioma al otro todo el tiempo. Es que hablan bien mocho. Y los estudiantes no deben aprender a hablar inglés así. {Well, the problem is that Mexican-American teachers change from one language to the other all the time. It’s that they speak Americanized Spanish. And the students shouldn’t learn to speak English that way.}

As this excerpt illustrates, the use of Spanglish in the classroom by transnational teachers, rather than the over-use of Spanish, appears to be the real criticism.

When I first met most of my transnational participants and they began speaking Spanglish, they inevitably said something similar to the following: “Oh, I’m sorry. Does it bother you when I do that?” This occurred even though I was also speaking Spanglish. In part, I believe that the context of Mexico has a great deal to do with their apologies. Their life histories contain painful stories of being criticized when they were younger in Mexico. Even Elvira asserted that before she lived in the U.S., she hated hearing Spanglish; yet now she admits to speaking it frequently. In other words, they seem to know very well that Spanglish is stigmatized in Mexico. They may also know that it is stigmatized in the U.S. This awareness did not come out in the course of our time together, but then again our relationship developed in Mexico and not in the U.S.

As I mentioned in Chapter Six, when Laura is emotional Spanglish flows at a rapid pace, especially when her husband is not around. Her husband, who does not speak English but wants their son to know it, hates Spanglish. Laura does her best not to use it in her own home. Yet, she never corrects her son. She always speaks to him in English and he generally answers her in Spanish or Spanglish. The following interaction between Laura and her son occurred one morning when her husband was out of town. I heard many such interactions between the two.

Eddie: Amá, ¿dónde está mi camisa? {Mom, where’s my shirt?}

Laura: It's in the dryer.

Eddie: No está en la dryer. {It's not in the dryer}.

Laura: Yes, it is. Look again.

Eddie: Found it, pero hay que plancharla. {Found it, but it has to be ironed.}

Laura does not allow her husband to admonish their son for using Spanglish because she thinks her son's Spanglish is part of a learning process:

Laura: I tell my husband that my son needs to answer back in whatever English he can. Otherwise, he won't get good at it. I mean I can ask Eddie questions in English, but he doesn't get to hear anyone answer back here in Mexico.

Although she obviously believes Eddie's Spanglish is part of the process of learning English, she is concerned that perhaps allowing Spanglish is "doing damage" to her son. In fact, most of the participants had questions as to whether Spanglish is harming their children or students. Negative attitudes toward Spanglish, or "linguistic terrorism" (Anzaldúa 1987), are prevalent on both sides of the border.

Despite this negative atmosphere and their own ambivalent feelings with respect to Spanglish, all of these participants frequently speak Spanglish in the

presence of their visiting transnational relatives and did so with me. Furthermore, they often defend Spanglish from criticism, especially when that criticism comes from an “outsider,” and when the “outsider” is outnumbered. This was apparent in several interactions I witnessed between transnationals and non-transnationals, such as the excerpt that follows. This exchange took place at Lulu’s home during a party for the *Candelaria*. Lulu is telling a story about a recent shopping trip she took to Texas during the Christmas break. Lulu is a non-transnational teacher of English and a friend of both Carmela and Nora. Carmela is a transnational teacher who is part of my original data collection. Nora is the same transnational presented in this study.

Lulu: Ay no, nunca voy a entender a los Tejanos. Mejor que usen nomás inglés porque lo del español, ay no. Vi un letrero en una maquina que decía: “No se puede refundir dinero. Gracias, El manager.” ¿Qué es eso? {Oh no, I am never going to understand Tejanos. Better that they use only English because their Spanish, oh no. I saw a sign on a machine that said: “Money cannot be refunded²⁷. Thank you, the manager.” What is that?}

Nora: What you mean what is it? It is a sign on a vending machine talking about money. Make the connection, Lulu, make the leap. I hate it when people criticize stuff like that.

Carmela: Basta {That’s enough}, Lulu. We never get a break. Damned if we do, damned if we don’t.

²⁷ Although I have translated *refundir* as refunded, in “standard” Mexican Spanish it means to recast, as in to recast metal.

Nora: Yeah, Lulu. Y yo oigo a mis estudiantes y aun tus hijos diciendo cosas como, “Estoy chateando” o “Haz clic” pero esos no son pochismos porque la gente que los dicen no son pochos. Pero nosotros, everything we say gets criticized. Déjanos en paz. {And I hear my students and even your kids saying things like, “I’m chatting” or “Click on the icon”, but those aren’t pochismos because the people that say them are not pochos. But us, everything we say gets criticized. Leave us in peace.}

Several key issues are present in this excerpt. Lulu’s criticism is directed toward the Spanglish used by *Tejanos*, and the entire conversation that evening up until that incident had been in Spanish. In a sense, Lulu believed that she was talking with Spanish-speaking Mexicans just like her, who would readily agree with her criticism. Yet, California-raised Carmela and Nora quickly jumped to the defense of these *Tejanos*. Although not evident in the transcripts, they attempted to enlist my help by throwing me glances and bumping my arm. It was a show of *poch* solidarity, by which they implicitly asserted that Spanglish is a valid language.

The way in which they mounted their protest is also critical. Nora immediately switched to English, but not just any English. She spoke at a rapid-fire pace and threw in specialized terms like “vending machine” and slang expressions, “Make the connection, Lulu, make the leap.” Lulu, who learned English as a foreign language, does not have access to such English. In this way, Nora asserted her linguistic superiority over Lulu. Carmela continued in this vein, first by issuing a command of sorts, “*Basta*”, in Spanish because she wanted to

make sure that Lulu understood the severity of the crime she had committed in criticizing Spanglish. Then, she reinforced both *pochos* solidarity and the idea that “we *pochos*”, (meaning Nora, Carmela and I), are linguistically superior to Lulu. Her comments, “We never get a break. Damned if we do, damned if we don’t,” had the effect of barring Lulu from participating in the conversation because there was no way Lulu could understand what Carmela was saying. Nora continued the isolation of Lulu by verifying that she did understand what Carmela was saying and suggesting that Lulu should have been able to understand, but did not.

Once the mission of establishing *pochos* solidarity and linguistic superiority was accomplished, Nora switched back into Spanish and offered a critique of the class issues surrounding Spanglish in Mexico. “*Chatear*” and “*Haz clic*” are perfectly acceptable Spanglish words because they are uttered by middle-class, computer savvy, educated Mexican youth, such as Lulu’s own children. However, Spanglish words used by those who live and work in the U.S. are not because these individuals are typically members of the working class. Nora got in one last gibe by code-switching before asking Lulu to leave us in peace. Thus, she reinforced the idea that transnationals are both linguistically and culturally different from Mexicans like Lulu.

As a whole, this interaction displays a strong sense of *pochos* solidarity and supports the idea that Spanglish is somehow the language of transnationals. I was a part of many conversations in which this same defense of and positive support for Spanglish surfaced, usually in opposition to criticism from non-transnationals. In other words, although my participants express both positive and

negative evaluations of Spanglish at times, they will defend it when threatened by a non-Spanglish speaker.

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT OF ENGLISH IN MEXICO

The social environment of Mexico and the accompanying attitudes toward English in which these transnational participants are living is very different from that of Spanish heritage language individuals, particularly those of Mexican origin, in the Southwest United States. Furthermore, as I will illustrate, this social environment has changed dramatically in recent years, with English becoming of major importance even in these rural areas. These participants have native or native-like bilingual proficiency in a “first world” language in a “third world” context. In fact, they speak what can be viewed as the number one language of power world-wide. The hegemony of English, particularly U.S. varieties, in the world today cannot be disputed.

In Nuevo Leon, the importance of English has increased exponentially in recent years and my participants have directly benefited from its increasing importance. Overall, there is a general sense that English is no longer a *luxury*, but rather a necessity in today’s world. It is frequently talked about in rather generic terms of *globalización* {globalization}, such as in the following excerpt taken from a training manual for English teachers in the public sector:

El Proyecto de Inglés en Primaria fue creado en el año 1993 ... en respuesta al proceso social, cultural y económico de globalización que requiere el conocimiento de una lengua extranjera... (Secretaría de Educación Pública de Nuevo Leon, 2002, p. 2) {The English in Primary School Project was created in 1993 ... in response to the social, cultural

and economic process of globalization which requires the knowledge of a foreign language...}

What is ironic, however, is that my participants were affected by the social, cultural and economic processes of globalization long before the term *globalization* became fashionable, and as a result are in a perfect position to benefit from this old, yet new, phenomenon.

In Mexico, the availability of English instruction in the private sector has skyrocketed with the proliferation of bilingual and immersion institutes (Grimaldo, 2001). Although once limited to Monterrey, there are now private bilingual and immersion institutes in both Lerdo and Montemayor. The push towards English within the realm of public education has also increased, as the excerpt provided above illustrates. However, access to English instruction within Nuevo Leon still tends to be strongly related to social class, with more affluent Mexicans paying dearly in an attempt to insure their children acquire this cultural capital. What is so unique about these transnational participants is that these children of field laborers, mechanics, a carpenter, and a bartender, already possess what everyone seems to want these days. Carely is clearly aware of this contradiction.

Es curioso, pero es que los de arriba quieren el inglés que nosotros, los de abajo ya tenemos. {It's strange, but it's that those from above want the English that we, those from below, already have.}

These transnational teachers are recognized by their supervisors and education officials as native speakers of American English. While I heard

complaints regarding particular classroom practices of transnational teachers from their superiors, never once was their command of the English language called into question. It is also rather telling that when education officials speak of transnational teachers they refer to them most frequently as “*los maestros mexicano-americanos*” {Mexican American teachers}.

Of course, these participants do know English very well when measured against a typical individual in this area of Mexico who learned English as a foreign language and this seems to be the point of comparison used. This is the opposite of the situation in which most Spanish heritage language individuals find themselves in the U.S. There, such individuals often are intentionally or unintentionally held to the standard of an educated monolingual from a Spanish-speaking country (Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci, 1998; Villa, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002; Potowski, Hernández & Cordero, 2002). It is a standard which many Spanish heritage language individuals may never reach. Consequently, they are set up for failure from day one, which leads to an increasingly negative self-evaluation of their heritage language.

In contrast to many Spanish heritage language speakers in the U.S., these transnational individuals do not display anything remotely resembling a negative self-evaluation of their abilities in English. They may have mentioned being weak in spelling or not knowing anything about the grammar terms used in the textbooks, but they all believe that they know English well. They tend to see themselves as their superiors see them, as native speakers. It is not difficult to maintain a positive self-evaluation of language proficiency when one is constantly

being told her English is *bonito* {pretty}. I was with Nora on four occasions when she was told this, twice with Elvira and twice with Carely. Furthermore, in the fourteen months I was in this area of Mexico, my participants and I frequently spoke English in public, and they also use English in public with their own children. I never once heard a criticism from bystanders. There was no “You’re in Mexico now, speak Spanish.” In contrast, I can not count the number of times that I have had people in the U.S. say to me, “You’re in America, speak English.”

Clearly, conditions in the social environment are currently favorable for the maintenance and continuing development of my participants’ English proficiency. English is highly valued in these areas, particularly by more affluent Mexicans. It is not denigrated as the language of manual laborers, as Spanish tends to be in the U.S. As a result, my participants are well aware that they possess something of great value. The constant positive reinforcement they receive regarding their language skills facilitates the development of a strong sense of pride in their English proficiency.

HERITAGE LANGUAGE STUDENTS IN MEXICAN SCHOOLS

For the most part, when these participants attended Mexican schools, neither their knowledge of English nor of the U.S. was validated. Most describe their English as a foreign language classes in Mexico in very negative terms. Of course, Elvira describes her Spanish as a foreign language classes in the U.S. negatively too. The term *heritage language* seems odd at first, especially when one thinks of English as a heritage language in Mexico. However, for my

participants, English is certainly not a foreign language. It is one of the languages spoken by their cousins, their aunts and uncles, their nieces and nephews, and even their own brothers and sisters. In some cases, English was their first language or both languages were acquired simultaneously. In other cases, English was acquired in an immersion setting at home and/or in school lasting far longer than the typical study abroad program. Whatever the individual case may be, in all cases, I find their knowledge of both U.S. English and U.S. culture to be far superior to that of the English as a foreign language professionals I came to know in Mexico. Although these individuals would be categorized by first language, second language, etc. in the U.S., these categories do not seem to fit in Mexico. English is the heritage language of my participants in Mexico because it was acquired, learned and is continually renewed as a result of their transnational heritage. Furthermore, I find their stories of their experiences in English language classes in Mexico to be parallel to Latino heritage language students of Spanish in the U.S. (Webb & Miller, 2000; Schwarzer & Petró, 2002; Benjamin, 1997)

Carely, although at an elite private *colegio*, describes being sent to run errands for her English teacher. Laura, who also attended private school in Mexico, said that she did not really learn anything in her English classes, but that she served as a teacher's helper and corrected papers. Lidia called her English classes "the pits" and said that she "slept through most of them." Nonetheless, she got good grades. She also mentions that she feels her teachers seemed "freaked out" by her English and says that they "had a hard time looking me in the face

when they said anything in English”. Even Elvira, who had not yet attended school in the States before taking her first English class in Mexico, had spent almost every summer visiting family in Texas since the age of five. Although she claims to have known very little English before attending high school in the U.S., she continuously described her English classes in Mexico as if she knew quite a bit. In the following excerpt, it is obvious that Elvira knew what English was supposed to sound like.

Elvira: Las clases de inglés en la secundaria, pues no había clases de inglés en primaria todavía... they were so boring. Y la maestra, de veras, no sabía nada. To be, to be, I am, you are, he/she/it is, todo el año to be, to be. Y no podía hablarlo bien o sea a lo mejor sabía leerlo... pero pronunciarlo bien, no para nada. Por ejemplo, como el primer día de clase, nos dijo, “Dees ees a buterflee, repitan todos, dees ees a buterflee” [dis is a βuterfli]. {English classes in junior high, well, there didn’t have English classes in elementary school yet...they were so boring. And the teacher really didn’t know anything. To be, to be, I am, you are, he/she/it is, all year long, to be, to be, And she couldn’t speak it well, that is, maybe she knew how to read it...but she couldn’t pronounce it well, not at all. For example, like the first day of class, she told us, “This is a butterfly, everyone repeat, this is a butterfly.”}

Mary: A what?

Elvira: My point exactly. A butterfly. Y le dije eso después de la clase, no enfrente de todos porque, pues, I didn’t want to diss her or nothing. Y le dije, “Maestra, es butterfly, mariposa es butterfly.” Y pues, se enojó y me dijo que ella había estudiado el inglés muchos años y que yo no sabía nada. Entonces al regresar a la casa, llamé a mi hermana en Tejas y le pregunté a mi sobrina y ella me dijo que sí es

butterfly. Pero de todos modos, no le dije eso a mi maestra, y ella, pues, de verdad, siempre me daba malas calificaciones. Y creo que fue por eso. {My point exactly. A butterfly. And I told her that after the class, not in front of everyone because I didn't want to diss her or nothing. And I told her, "Teacher, it's a butterfly, mariposa is butterfly." And well, she got mad and told me that she had studied English for many years and that I didn't know anything. Then when I went home, I called my sister in Texas and asked my niece and she told me that yes, it is butterfly. But anyway, I didn't tell my teacher that, and she, well, really, she always used to give me bad grades. And I think it was because of that.}

Obviously, as a result of her prior visits to the U.S., Elvira had already acquired a great deal of English long before she enrolled in high school as a sophomore. Although her knowledge of English was not supported by her classroom teacher, she was able to phone a family member who gave her the validation she was seeking. Experiences similar to Elvira's involving heritage language speakers of Spanish in the Spanish as a foreign language in the U.S. have been documented (Schwarzer & Petron, 2002; Webb, 2000; Benjamin, 1997)

Nora, whose transition into Mexican schools and society at age 14 was particularly traumatic, coped with the transition in a way not unlike some of my own Latino bilingual adolescent students in the U.S.: she refused to use her heritage language.

Nora: Everyone gave me so much shit when I first got back about my Spanish. Called me a gringa or a pocha. Well, I decided right then, that I wasn't going to speak English

again ever in Mexico. I didn't care if there was a gringo laying there dying in the street who needed me to translate, I wasn't going to help him because I wasn't going to ever speak English in Mexico again.

Mary: Not even in your English classes at school?

Nora: Nope, I just sat there and pretended I didn't know any English. Like even if I had to answer a question, I would make it sound all Spanish like. You know, "I yam japi." [a yam xapi] But I was always the top student in English and I never had to even open the book or study for a test. Of course, I didn't learn anything, not one thing.

As a Spanish teacher in the U.S., I have had lots of students who, like Nora with English, pretended not to know Spanish, often in an attempt to seem more "American" and distance themselves from new, more "Mexican" immigrants. Nora, in fact, did the same as an adolescent in Mexico. She tried to hide her *pochó* side in an effort to seem more "Mexican." As an adult, however, Nora, like all my participants, made peace (albeit at times an uneasy peace) with the pain and has turned her multiple selves into both a source of pride and income.

ENGLISH AS CULTURAL CAPITAL IN THE WORLD OF WORK

If my participants' heritage language and cultural knowledge were not validated when they were students in Mexican schools, such has not been the case with regards to the world of work. None of these individuals has a college degree nor is a *normalista* {graduate of teacher training school}, although both Nora and

Carely are now in the process of obtaining a degree in education. However, they have all been able to parlay their linguistic talents into relatively well-paying teaching positions in rural areas where steady jobs are hard to come by. Furthermore, they earn more money and receive more *respect* than their education levels and the class origin of their parents would normally dictate in Mexico.

The income that these participants receive teaching English cannot be underestimated, especially within the context of Mexico. In 2002, Nora estimates earning the equivalent of \$800.00 U.S. dollars per month. Although this seems like a paltry sum in the U.S., the minimum wage in rural Nuevo Leon in 2002 was a mere 38.30 pesos per day (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, 2002), which works out to be approximately \$4.00 U.S. dollars per day or \$120.00 U.S. dollars a month. Given the fact that my participants are the children of marginalized rural working class parents, it is highly unlikely that they would have attained the education levels they have or be earning even minimum wage had their parents remained in Mexico.

The fact that my participants are able to continue living in rural Nuevo Leon is also significant. Canak and Swanson (1998) asserted that social mobility in Mexico is very much tied to migration whether that migration is internal (from rural to urban) or external to the United States. The external migration which their parents originally engaged in provided these participants with entrance into the middle class in Mexico and a relatively high degree of control over where they live. Unlike their parents, these participants have not been forced by economic conditions to migrate at all. They are able to trade the cultural capital they

acquired as children of Mexican immigrants in the U.S. for a relatively comfortable standard of living in rural Mexico. This is not to say that they believe they or their own children will not be forced by economic conditions to leave rural Mexico in the future. However, as I will illustrate, urban Mexico is not even a part of their hypothetical roadmap. Instead, they see their and their children's future to be either "here" in rural Nuevo Leon or "there" in the U.S., and plan accordingly.

If these participants initially viewed their English proficiency and transnational heritage as a detriment to their success or a source of embarrassment because they did not fit in with their monolingual classmates, they eventually learned that they possess what others would pay to get. Laura, who graduated *prepa* and completed only one year of business secretarial school in Mexico, has never had difficulty finding work via her English in Montemayor. She has been employed as a translator for a U.S. based citrus company with a plant in Montemayor, as the owner and instructor of her own English school for young children, as a teacher in the private and public sector, and currently as coordinator of English instruction at the *colegio* she once attended. Carely began giving private English lessons while still a student at *prepa*. Lidia was offered a job to play with and talk in English to the preschool children of a wealthy landowner in Turco while still in *secundaria*.

Nora's story of how she landed her first job teaching English in Mexico is a particularly good illustration of someone who tried to hide her *pocho* side until she discovered its worth. Nora, who initially refused to speak English in Mexico,

got her first job because of her English ability and not because she had completed secretarial school. In the excerpt that follows, Nora describes landing her first teaching position. All of the students at the secretarial school Nora attended had to submit a résumé to the principal's office as a requirement for graduation. Less than an hour after she submitted hers, Nora was summoned to the principal's office to answer questions about her schooling in California.

Nora: So then el director {the principal} calls me out of class to his office. Man, I thought I was in trouble at first, but then he asks me about my résumé. And I told him, yeah, I went to school in California. So like then he hands me this like book of instructions in English for like a VCR and tells me to read it en voz alta {aloud}. So I did, but not all Spanish like I did in English class, but like I normally read English. I mean this was el director. And I also thought maybe he knew of a job for me like as a secretary somewhere. So I guess I wanted to impress him or something. So I started reading out loud. And then he offered me a job to teach for the next school year. Oh, and he paid me to translate those VCR instructions for him because he bought the VCR in the States and didn't know how to work it. So I guess I just decided then that if I could use my English to make money in Mexico, I would.

After less than five minutes spent reading aloud from VCR manual, Nora had a translating job and a position teaching English. She had discovered the value of her heritage language and no longer felt the need to hide it. English, although not valued in the adolescent world of school, has proven to be of great value in the adult world of work. Clearly, what had previously caused her pain became her gain.

At times it was hard for me to believe that the Nora of today is the same person who had curled up in a ball on my sofa as she spoke of her return to Mexico as an adolescent whose method of coping was to remain silent. She had simply stopped talking in any language in public. But silent Nora is no longer silent. Today's Nora delights in her daughter's developing English and she readily fires back corrections to English instructional materials produced by her highly educated, English as a foreign language supervisors. She switches without pause from speaking to her father in his brand of rural Spanish to speaking to the engineer who lives next door in his brand of rural Spanish. With her transnational relatives, friends and acquaintances or me, she generally speaks in what may be her preferred language: Spanglish. Today's Nora describes herself in a manner where the exact wording depends on her geographical location at the time.

Nora: I'm American-Mexican at least over here in Mexico. Does that word even exist?... I would be Mexican-American in the States, but here, well, here I'm bien pocha.

Elvira's story is also one of pain, but this time it is the pain of going to the U.S. rather than that of returning to Mexico. But like Nora, the pain she endured turned to triumph and success in Mexico. I first met Elvira when I gave her the oral proficiency exam required as part of the screening process for potential English teachers in Nuevo Leon. She was at the point of returning to the U.S. because there was no work in Rancho del Valle or the nearest large town. It is the path all but one of her eight brothers and sisters have been forced to take as young

adults. However, unlike her much older brothers and sisters who would not go to the U.S. for the first time until they were young adults, Elvira had benefited from extended visits to the U.S. from the age of five and several years of high school in Texas. Both factors contributed to Elvira's development of a native-like English proficiency.

This knowledge of English affords Elvira the opportunity not only to stay in Mexico, but to stay in the rural area of her birth. It is an opportunity that many, including her siblings, do not have. The value of being able to stay in Rancho del Valle cannot be measured in dollars or pesos. Her fiancé, who is from the large town nearest to Rancho del Valle and has studied to be a civil engineer, is living and working in Monterrey because there is no work for him in this rural area despite his family's connections²⁸. He has suggested to Elvira on more than one occasion that she move to Monterrey because she could make more money with her English there. Elvira, however, is not interested in moving to Monterrey, no matter what the salary.

Elvira: I told Jorge, no, no, no. If it were only about money, I would go back to Texas. I can make more money there than Monterrey and I have family there. Pero Monterrey, ay no. No tengo nadie ahí. {But Monterrey, oh no. I have no one there.} I want to stay here in Rancho del Valle or else I'll live in Texas, but Monterrey, no para nada {not for anything}.

²⁸ As it turns out, her fiancé's family have strong ties to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and often had traditionally been employed by governmental agencies in the area. When the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) swept federal, state and many local elections in Nuevo Leon, his family found itself on the losing side and consequently their connections diminished in value.

The idea that one's love of Mexico is very much tied to place of origin in rural Nuevo Leon is not unique to Elvira. It is present in all my participants. They would never consider living anywhere else in Mexico. The cultural capital they acquired in the U.S. has enabled them to prosper in rural Nuevo Leon. At present, they do not need to migrate anywhere.

INSIDE THE TRANSNATIONAL CLASSROOM

In all of their classrooms, these transnational teachers impart cultural lessons constantly. They tell stories about their school days in the U.S. and “translate” pictures so that their students will understand what they are looking at. Some of the textbooks are basically reprints of ESL texts published for use in the U.S., so there is often little accompanying background information because any ESL student in the U.S. would already know it. For example, in one text, there is a picture of a child carrying a school lunch tray. Lidia explained the picture to her group of sixth graders.

Lidia: Mira el dibujito del boy. Tiene una bandeja con su food porque allá te dan de comer en la escuela al mediodía. Allá los kids están en la school desde las eight in the morning hasta las three in the afternoon y por eso, they eat at school en vez de la casa Y ¿ves el cartoncito ahí? It's milk. Porque todos los children tienen que tomar milk in school. Ramón, do you like milk? {Look at the picture of the boy. He has a tray with his food because over there they feed you in school at noon. Over there, kids are in school from eight in the morning until three in the afternoon and that's why, they eat at school instead of at home. And see the little carton there? It's milk. Because all the children have to drink milk in school. Ramón, do you like milk?}

As above example illustrates, both cultural lessons and code-switching are common in their classrooms. This is particularly true at the public elementary schools because the children only have English class twice a week. These teachers use English to reinforce the vocabulary the children are learning or have learned, and Spanish to make sure the children understand the cultural information. They modify the vocabulary in the textbooks in accordance with their own experiences and language usages, which generally seem to me to be better choices too. “Kids” and “children” are freely interchanged because both are of equal importance. “Backpack” replaces “book bag”; a “shop” becomes a “store.”

The non-transnational teachers I observed never appear to deviate from the content and vocabulary of the textbooks, nor do they offer cultural explanations. But these transnational teachers do so all the time. As mentioned previously, non-transnational teachers never code-switch; they translate, saying a few sentences in English and then repeating everything in Spanish. In addition, all of these transnational teachers devote considerably more attention to pronunciation in their English classrooms than non-transnational teachers. Education officials in Nuevo Leon see this as one of the benefits of having transnational teachers in the classroom:

Los estudiantes de los maestros mexicano-americanos hablan mejor o sea pronuncian mejor las palabras.” {The students of Mexican American teachers speak better, that is, they pronounce the words better.}

The emphasis on pronunciation is directly related to the experiences of these transnational teachers in the U.S. They assert that Americans do not want to listen to anyone who has an accent.

In contrast to their own English as a foreign language teachers in Mexico, these transnational teachers are well aware which of their students had lived in the U.S. All note that it is easy to identify such students.

Nora: You can tell right away even if they are trying to hide it, you know, like I did. Because they will say or write something that only someone who lived over there would know, like something that doesn't come out of a book. I mean I probably did that too by accident in my English class, but my teachers didn't know real English.

There is no hiding from these transnational teachers. "Real" English, as opposed to "book" English, is a dead give-away, which my participants pick up on immediately because they are proficient speakers of "real" English.

Consequently, all of these transnational teachers tell stories of trying to provide moral support to their own transnational students. These participants understand the difficulties involved in making the transition from the U.S. to Mexico and do what they can to help their transnational students. Nora, who had been branded as a "bad influence" when she entered Mexican schools as a student because she came from the U.S., often sees replays of the same traumatic scenario as a teacher.

Nora: Like people in school would not want to like have a friendship with me because I was from the United States and people from the United States to their opinion are like crazy, you know, they smoke pot and you know, they get laid.... But I still hear it, like when I hear people criticize some of my students from over there. Like this Mari I have

in class, you know, at la prepa, who is from Houston, they like started calling her a puta {whore} like the first day she got here because she was from over there. And they didn't even know her. They didn't even know that she came by herself to live with her grandma because her step-dad, a White guy, was trying to put the moves on her. She would never tell them that, but she told me, she told me. But there is nothing I can do to make things all better for her. So I just listen to her and tell her I know how she feels. That people here said the same things about me. And they didn't even know me.

Nora empathizes with her transnational students and often becomes their sounding board and shoulder to cry on. She even went so far as to get the above mentioned transnational student a job teaching English, figuring that a steady income would help ease Mari's painful transition. All of my participants see themselves in their transnational students and serve as role models to these students. I saw this in their classrooms when their transnational students would linger around them and talk in English.

In addition to providing moral support to their transnational students, my participants validate the language skills these students bring to the classroom. Although these transnational teachers speak slowly and enunciate clearly for the benefit of their English as a foreign language learners, they address rapid-fire comments in English to their transnational students, as is evidenced in the following classroom interaction:

Carely: {Speaking very slowly and gesturing to the whole class.}
Open your books to page ten, page ten, open your books.
{Speaking rapidly to a transnational student.} Freddie, run next door and see if I can borrow some chalk from Maestra {teacher} Berta.

Freddie: She ain't there. I'll ask Maestra Nancy.

Carely: Whatever, just get me some chalk.

Carely does not correct Freddie's "ain't" although she knows it was "incorrect" according to prescriptive grammar rules. She feels it is important that Freddie feel proud of his "real" English. By interacting with their transnational students in this manner, all of my participants provide positive reinforcement of the language skills these students already possess. On several occasions, I heard these them encourage their transnational students to keep up their English. Most also lend them magazines or books and give them alternative assignments.

As a whole, their efforts are not systematic. But it is obvious that they empathize with these students who are like them and make some attempt to address their needs. Lidia even went so far as to demand additional materials to address the needs of her transnational students because as she stated, "Look at this book. How can I teach them with this? If you have lived just six months over there, you would know more than what's in this book." Interestingly, I have said almost those same words when trying to get appropriate materials for my Spanish heritage language students in the U.S. Unfortunately, Lidia was unable to obtain additional materials, which is one of the reasons she decided to return to the U.S. and pursue a degree in education there.

Education officials in Mexico are aware of the curricular and methodological issues involved with having transnational students in English as a

foreign language classrooms. I was asked on a couple of occasions to offer tips and suggestions in the form of a workshop, but like Lidia, I found it difficult considering the sheer lack of appropriate materials. Once again, I have faced a similar situation in the U.S. with large numbers of Spanish heritage language students in my Spanish as a foreign language classrooms. However, in contrast to these Mexican education officials who seem bothered by the waste of linguistic talent in their classrooms, I was most often told that my Spanish heritage language students did not need to study Spanish because what they really needed was to develop better English skills. What a difference the context makes! In the U.S., Spanish is seen as a “third world” language in a “first world” context.

As teachers, my participants do not just see themselves in the eyes of their transnational students. They also understand the economic realities of their working class students because they relate it to their own parents’ experiences. In this way, they tend to view immigration to the U.S. as a likely path for many of the rural, working class children they teach. This is reflected in what they have to say about teaching English in Mexico and how they actually teach it. The following lesson occurred in one of Nora’s English classes in the poor elementary school located in the place where her parents were born.

Nora: Okay, now, el libro dice yes, pero les voy a enseñar otra palabra más importante que significa lo mismo {the book says yes, but I’m going to teach you a more important word which means the same thing}. Yeah. Now everybody. Yeah.

Students: Yeah.

Nora: Again.

Students: Yeah.

Nora: Lupita, do you like milk?

Lupita: Yeah.

Nora: Good. Very good.

Student: Tícher, ¿Cómo se escribe yeah? {Teacher, how do you write yeah?}

Nora: No importa como se escribe. Lo más importante es que lo digas bien. Yeah. {It doesn't matter how it's written. What is important is that you say it well.}

Student: Yeah.

Nora: Porque si te para la migra al otro lado y te pregunta, “Are you a U.S. citizen?” Eres ciudadano? Y tú le dices yes, pues, la migra va a saber de inmediato que no eres de allá porque los de allá dicen yeah. {Because if immigration stops you on the other side and asks you, “Are you a U.S. citizen? Are you a citizen? And you tell them yes, well, immigration is going to know right away that you are not from there because everyone from there says yeah.}

Students: Yeah.

Student: You are citizen?

Nora: Yeah, sure am.

Student: Yeah, sure am.

Like the above example, all of these participants tend to emphasize language they believe their working class students may need should they ever end up in the U.S. Lidia states very concretely what all these participants tend to believe.

Lidia: I know lots of these kids van a ir para el otro lado. {I know lots of these kids are going to go to the other side.} It's bad here for them and I think it's getting worse. So what choice do they have?"

Obviously, these children of yesterday's rural poor understand the plight facing the children of today's working poor.

THE TRANSMISSION OF ENGLISH AND TRANSCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE TO THE NEXT GENERATION

All of the participants acknowledge the value of English in Mexico and want to pass this cultural capital on to their own children. However, they

mention this only in passing, usually with a quick phrase about globalization and/or the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), or *el Tratado de Libre Comercio* as it is known in Mexico. Carely's brief comment is a fairly typical one.

Carely: English is important aquí en México {here in Mexico} these days. You know, todo eso del Tratado de Libre Comercio {all this about NAFTA}. You can always make money with English. And my son and this new one [unborn child] are lucky enough me living in the same house.

Certainly, the fact they are earning a living in rural Nuevo Leon based on this cultural capital make its value, both monetarily and with respect to remaining in their rural homes, very salient.

In contrast to the brief comments they make concerning the importance of English in the age of globalization, they spend considerably more time talking about the need to pass on their English and transcultural understandings to the next generation for reasons other than those related to the global economy. For some, it is a matter of identity. Nora has always asserted that English was her first language and she usually speaks English to her three year old daughter.

Nora: English is a part of who I am and it doesn't matter how long I live in Mexico. I have been here more years now than I was in the States, but it still is a part of me. I want my daughter to know me and that means she has to know English. So I always talk to her in English. Spanish she can get everywhere here, but I want her to have my English.

Nora's daughter will acquire English because it is an important part of her mother's identity. The same holds true for Lidia, who has spent her whole life

going back and forth. She is not sure what language was her first language. She says she does not have a “best” language, but laughingly asserts that she is most fluent in Spanglish. Although Lidia does not have children yet, she has strong ideas on what she would like for her children.

Lidia: I know Spanish and I know English, but I like speaking Spanglish best of all. And all three of those languages, well, I suppose Spanglish isn't a language, like officially, but it should be. I've always wanted to write kid's books in Spanglish for all the kids who grow up like me. Or like a textbook, you know, “Spanglish for Dummies.” Anyways, all three are part of me and I want my kids to have that too.

English, Spanish and Spanglish are important for Lidia's future children because all three are an important part of who she is.

Laura, who lived in the U.S. until age ten and whose brothers and parents currently live in Houston, made a few references to the difficulties involved in a “mixed” marriage. Her husband is from Montemayor and had never lived or even visited the U.S. until after they were married. Initially, I was taken aback by her comments. I have never considered a marriage such as hers being a “mixed” marriage, but she certainly does.

Laura: It was a lot harder being a mixed couple in the U.S.... I mean Eddie, my husband, he's only from here. He doesn't know English and worse he doesn't know what to do over there. I mean he didn't know about writing checks or like ordering Chinese food by the number, stuff like that. It was like having two kids instead of one, he couldn't do anything on his own. It was exhausting. It was better the second time we lived there, but still he hates it over there and that's hard. I don't hate it. Maybe because I know what to say and I know what do. And I want my son to know what to say and what to do over there.

Having had to deal with a spouse who is totally dependent upon her in the U.S. because he does not understand the language or culture, Laura is extremely concerned that her son develop the same linguistic and cultural facility she possesses so that he would see the U.S. as she sees it. She wants her son to be like her rather than like her husband. Carely, who is married to a man who had only been to the U.S. once to shop in McAllen before their marriage, voiced sentiments similar to Laura's.

For all of these participants, the transmission of English and transcultural knowledge is important for maintaining family ties across borders. Even though these participants live in Mexico, members of their family live in the U.S. All of Nora's siblings and their children live in Texas or California. Carely's mother, her sisters and their children live in Texas. Six of Elvira's eight siblings live in Texas with their families. Laura's parents, her brother and his children live in Houston; one brother goes back and forth. Four of Lidia's six siblings and her parents live in Chicago. This list does not include more distant relatives. Although these participants say that all of their family members in the U.S., even the children, have a communicative ability in Spanish, that is not enough. These transnational participants frequently visit family there and they want their children to be able to fully participate in life when they go there. For example, something as simple as their children going to the movies with their cousins would be problematic because movies in the U.S. are in English.

Finally, the transmission of English and transcultural knowledge to the next generation is viewed by these participants as part of a contingency plan in

case their economic situation changes in Mexico. It must be remembered that these transnationals are the children of yesterday's rural poor, who were forced by economic circumstances to immigrate. For some members of their families, living and working in the U.S. is still a necessity. For example, most of Elvira's siblings are in the U.S. because there are no employment opportunities in Rancho del Valle. Although these participants now live comfortably in Mexico, they do not view their economic situation as being necessarily stable. They see returning to the U.S. to live and work as a distinct possibility. When they ponder their own children's future, they consider the realities of both sides of the border.

The possible return to the U.S. is obvious in the fact that these participants spend a great deal of effort in maintaining their own legal status in the U.S. (if they are not citizens) and in making sure their own children also have legal status there. Both Nora and Carely, who are U.S. citizens, are in the process of obtaining U.S. citizenship for their children born in Mexico. Carely, who was pregnant with her second child at the time of this study, had already made plans to give birth in the U.S. in order to avoid the red tape she experienced legalizing her first born. Laura did go to the U.S. to have her son so he would never have any trouble. Furthermore, the events of September 11th in the U.S. provoked fear among those participants and/or their family members who are not citizens. Elvira seems to sum up the general feeling among these participants, both about the relative instability of Mexico and the fear that a post-September 11th U.S. would put their legal status in jeopardy.

Elvira: Another part of the reason I am becoming a citizen now is todo eso del once de septiembre. I have a mica and all, but

who knows what la migra will do. We're all changing our citizenship. I'm still Mexican in my heart, but I need that passport *por si acaso* because you never know what's going to happen in Mexico either. {Another part of the reason I am becoming a citizen now is all this about September 11th. I have permanent resident card and all, but who knows what the Immigration and Naturalization Service will do. We're all changing our citizenship. I'm still Mexican in my heart, but I need that passport just in case because you never know what's going to happen in Mexico either.}

Obviously, legal status in the U.S. is important to them because they see their future in Mexico as uncertain. They live comfortably now, but they believe economic conditions in Mexico could change overnight. They and their parents have benefited from immigration and from having legal status in the U.S., and they want the same benefits for their children.

Yet, their contingency plan involves more than just legal maneuvering. They are also very concerned about providing their children with the necessary skills to survive in the U.S. *por si acaso* {just in case}. All of the participants, whether they have children yet or not, have a plan to ensure that their children develop these skills. A key part of this plan is to have their children attend elementary school in the U.S. for several years. Laura, Nora, and Carely already had children at the time of this study; all three speak English to their children. However, Laura is the only participant with a school age child. She did carry out this plan, although not for the length of time she, her parents, and siblings living in the U.S. felt was necessary.

Laura: I always talk to Eddie [her son] in English, but I kept telling my husband that wasn't enough. I wanted him to be in school over there like I was at least 'til fourth or fifth grade. My mom and dad said the same thing to him [her

husband], but he didn't want to stay. So we came back. And I told him that now Eddie was going to have an accent in English, like my youngest brother does and that's not good.

Like Laura, all of the participants tend to see elementary school as the key because they feel it is crucial that their children develop native-like pronunciation in English. As with the case of Laura's brother, their obsession with pronunciation is tied to their own families' transnational experiences. All of the participants, except Nora, state that their parents eventually did learn English and that their English is intelligible. However, these participants believe that Americans in general have a low tolerance for accented English. Their children need to develop native speaker English in order to be treated well in the U.S.

Needless to say, none of the new private immersion or bilingual schools would do for their children because they believe that no school in Mexico can provide their children with native-like English proficiency, nor the appropriate cultural tools. They want their children to know what to say and what to do in the U.S., to be able to negotiate with the same skill and ease that these participants believe they possess. This cannot be taught in Mexico at all. Therefore, their contingency plan includes living in the U.S. for several years regardless of whether they are doing well financially in Mexico. In this way, their children will be able to both experience life in the U.S. and attend elementary school there.

CONCLUSION

These transnational individuals demonstrate a fairly high degree of bilingual ability in both English and Spanish, although neither language appears

to fall within the range of a “prestige” dialect. They possess a high degree of confidence in their English proficiency, which is constantly being renewed as a result of their transnational ties. They are also quite proficient speakers of Spanglish, although they have contradictory views of Spanglish. This does not, however, prevent them from engaging in *pochó* solidarity when confronted with criticism from non-transnationals.

The social context of Mexico has changed dramatically with importance of English growing exponentially. As heritage language speakers of English, my participants are positioned in a favorable environment for the maintenance and continuing development of their heritage language. They are considered by others to be native speakers of English and receive constant positive recognition for their abilities in the language. This is the exact opposite of the environment that heritage language speakers of Spanish experience in the U.S.

As students in their English classes in Mexican schools, they seem to have suffered a similar fate similar to that of Latino heritage language students of Spanish in the U.S. The linguistic and cultural skills they possess were not validated. However, this cultural capital has proven to be of great value in the world of work, enabling these transnationals to both earn a relatively comfortable living as teachers of English and remain in their rural places of origin.

Their English language classrooms appear to be different from those of non-transnational teachers because they bring their transnational experiences and knowledge into their classrooms. They display a high degree of empathy for their

transnational students and assume that some of their working class students will be forced to immigrate to the U.S. in the future.

These transnational participants seek to pass on their English and transcultural knowledge to the next generation for reasons of their own identity, its importance in maintaining transnational family ties and as part of a contingency plan in the event of economic crisis in Mexico. They believe the only way to insure that the children will develop the same transnational skills they possess is by living and attending elementary school in the U.S.

CHAPTER 8: NEGOTIATING BORDERS WITH VALORES DEL RANCHO

Aunque somos del mismo barro, no es lo mismo catrín que charro.

Mexican proverb

In this chapter, I describe how these individuals have negotiated and continue to negotiate both class and national borders and how these borders have been redefined by the transnational experience. First, I begin with a discussion of class borders as they relate to Mexico and explain how these participants negotiate these class borders, carving for themselves a “third space” in Mexico which is neither entirely middle class nor working class. Next, I highlight the lessons they believe that they learned from their “traditional” working class parents, which I have termed “*valores del rancho*,” or values of the rural working class. These values are divided into three sections: the importance of hard work, the value of money in the long term, and commitment to family. Although my participants see these values as traditional, the way they play out in practice is highly connected to the transnational experience. The third space they have carved for themselves transcends both class and national borders.

NEGOTIATING CLASS BORDERS IN MEXICO

These participants live very middle class lives, if one uses standard of living as a measure. They all have large, well-equipped, homes, vehicles in good

condition, steady professional employment, and earn a relatively good income. Yet to say that these participants are like any other middle-class Mexicans would be a mistake. They do not see themselves as typical middle-class Mexicans. The following comment from Elvira typifies how these participants view themselves in relation to other Mexicans.

Elvira: Nosotros tenemos lo que tenemos porque mi papá trabajó allá. No somos como los esnobs aquí que son de familias adineradas. {We have what we have because my dad worked over there. We aren't like the snobs here who come from families with money.}

All are adamant in stressing that had their parents not immigrated to the U.S., their lives would have been very different. In fact, one of the most prominent themes which pervaded the data is their strong belief that they owe their current success in Mexico to the original immigration of their parents. This is not only due to the fact that these participants acquired English as a result of this immigration, but also because they view social mobility within the context of Mexico as non-existent. Time and time again, I was told that if a person was born poor in Mexico and stayed in Mexico, he or she would die poor in Mexico. Lidia's comment is typical of the way these participants feel about their life chances had their families stayed in Mexico.

Lidia: Pues, sé que está bien difícil a veces en los States, pero aquí, ay no. {Well, I know it is difficult at times in the States, but here, oh no.} You have to understand. There maybe only a little chance to get ahead there, but at least there's a chance. Aquí no hay nada. {Here there is nothing.} If you are born poor, you die poor, punto y aparte {period, end of story}. No matter how hard you work, you're screwed. You have to work like a burro here too if you're poor y con suerte {with luck} you'll be able to

eat. That's why Mexicanos are going to keep crossing, even though it's dangerous, even though you get treated like shit over there. Because you get treated like shit even more in Mexico if you're poor. Mexicanos will keep going because a little hope is better than no hope.

The other participants echo the sentiments expressed by Lidia. Life is hard in the U.S., but even harder in Mexico if one is born poor. Even Nora's father, Don José, who along with his wife spent most of his adult life toiling in the fields, first in Texas and later in California, has no regrets regarding his immigration. I spent many evenings sitting outside talking with Don José, often at cross-purposes. My questions often seemed irrelevant, to him or rather that the answers were ones I should have already known. I asked him once how he felt about his decision to immigrate. He first shot Nora what I came to know as his "What is she crazy or just plain stupid" look, then answered,

Don José: Mira, todo lo que tengo. Claro que me trataban bien mal allá, pero me trataban bien mal acá también. Y por lo menos allá me pagaban. Y todavía me pagan. Cada mes me paga el gobierno de allá [referring to his Social Security benefits]. Soy mexicano pero nunca recibí nada de México. Aquí todos los que nacen pobres mueren de hambre aunque trabajan día y noche. {Look at everything I have. Of course they treated me really badly over there, but they treated me really badly over here too. And at least they used to pay me over there. And they still pay me. Every month the government over there pays me. I am Mexican, but I received nothing from Mexico. Here those that are born poor die of hunger even though they work night and day.}

Don José is content with his success. For someone who had started off as a landless farm laborer in Mexico, he certainly has done well for himself. He owns a large home, more than a dozen rental houses, two orange groves and a

small ranch. He even continues to invest a portion of his Social Security in expanding his rental houses or buying calves to raise and later sell. There is no doubt that he went to the U.S. with the specific intent of returning to Mexico and loves living in Mexico. However, he harbors no animosity regarding his years of back-breaking labor in the U.S. because he had done the same labor in Mexico for much less money. Don José is well respected and admired by his working class *compadres* in Lerdo. He is also known to advise the children and grandchildren of his working class *compadres* to “irse pa’ el otro lado” {to go to the other side of the border} because “no hay futuro pa’ la gente humilde en Mexico” {there is no future for humble people in Mexico}. He also counsels his own children living in the States who express a desire at times to return to live in Mexico, to “aguantarse” {put up with it} in order to maximize their Social Security benefits.

Although it is impossible to play “what if” with any certainty, it would seem that these participants are not off the mark regarding this point. Various researchers have noted that social mobility for the rural poor in Mexico has been historically tied to migration, whether that migration is internal to Mexican cities or external to the U.S. (Canak & Swanson, 1998; Valdés, 1996; Trueba, 1999b). The parents of these participants had chosen the route of external migration, and these participants play “what if” all the time. In their minds, there is no uncertainty; they are convinced that immigration led to their rise in status in Mexico. However, their rise in social status was not accompanied by a feeling of comfort and solidarity with those in the Mexican middle class. Instead, they direct a great deal of criticism at the Mexican middle class in the form of jokes,

stories, and comments on their laziness or their excessive spending habits, which these participants consider to be a form of public display. They also criticize the upper class in Mexico, particularly politicians, but nowhere near as frequently as they do the middle class. In part, this is probably due to the fact they interact constantly with the middle class.

In order to understand these participants' ambivalent feelings toward the Mexican middle class, it is necessary to understand the dominant discourse of social class in Mexico, which in a nutshell incorporates the idea that progress in Mexico is held back because of the "problem of the unwashed masses." Although the official rhetoric of the Mexican Revolution exalts the common man and "las clases humildes" {the humble classes}, it remains part of the national mythology and means little in practical terms, much like the glorification of the indigenous past does little to address the present day plight of indigenous peoples in Mexico. For example, during one of my visits to Monterrey prior to conducting this research, a Mexican education official asked me what my research intentions were with respect to Mexico. I stated my general interest, saying that I was interested in issues of Mexican/Mexican American education because as a group we are not necessarily very successful in U.S. schools. I was promptly informed that I need only look at the type of Mexicans, "puro campesino, puro burro" {all peasants and donkeys}, who cross over to the U.S. in order to find the reason for this lack of academic success. This Mexican education official is not alone. U.S. education officials too have a long history of blaming the poor in general and poor Latinos in particular for their "ignorance" through deficit-based models (Valencia,

1991, 1997). Certainly, in the U.S. every group has a derogatory term to refer to the lower classes of their group. Middle class Anglos speak of “white trash”; middle class African-Americans talk of someone as being so “ghetto.” Among middle class Mexican-Americans, I have heard a myriad of terms.

As a whole, it is impossible to miss the criticisms directed towards the poor, at least in the areas I visited in Nuevo Leon. Regardless of where the poor originate, the euphemism used in these areas to describe those who lack formal education and make their living from manual labor is to refer to them as *del rancho*, which is similar in meaning to the word, “hillbilly.” Being pegged as *del rancho* brings with it a slew of negative stereotypes like dirty, stupid, shiftless, and lazy. This stereotyping of the poor is so pervasive that it plays out on daily basis through pat phrases. For example, when a child becomes mussed from play or commits an error of etiquette by wiping his/her nose on a sleeve, it is common to hear comments like, “Mi’jo parece niño del rancho.” {My child you look like a child of the rural poor.} From non-transnational educators, I heard frequent comments about lack of intellectual ability of *niños del rancho* and that the parents of these children do not value education.

The following example is one of many in which my participants, who are the children of manual laborers with little formal education, display an awareness and a critique of this dominant discourse. Sandra, my next door neighbor in Lerdo, is a pre-school teacher in a very poor neighborhood on the outskirts of Lerdo. Her husband is an *ingeniero* {engineer}, a fact that she frequently works into most conversations. Neither of the two have transnational ties. Sandra often

complains about the parents of her students saying that as *Padres de Familia* they are supposed to provide the school with supplies and labor to keep the school in running order. Her complaints always end with the same phrase: “Es que son del rancho y no les importa la educación.” {It’s that they are from the rural poor class and education isn’t important to them.} Midway through one of Sandra’s first diatribes against the parents and children of this poor *colonia*, Nora requested in English that I ask Sandra how this preschool came into existence. I would find out from Sandra that the school exists because the mothers in the zone had mounted a protest and petitioned the local government to donate the land and helped construct the actual building along with their husbands. Nora is much too polite to ever directly challenge Sandra’s negative evaluation of these poor families, but she also seemed very concerned that I understood the inherent contradiction involved in Sandra’s view of the situation.

Nora sought to both distance herself from Sandra and to point out the contradiction involved in Sandra’s negative characterization of the working poor by asking me in English, which Sandra does not understand. In this way, English is the language of resistance. Time and time again, when middle class friends and neighbors criticized the rural working poor, my participants would interject comments in English in order to convey to me that there is another side to story. One day Elvira and I ran into her future mother-in-law, who is very much a member of the “old money” landowning class. The woman began telling a detailed story about how she believed one of the *señoras* {servants} she employed was stealing from her. Although Elvira always demonstrates the utmost

politeness, she turned to me mid-way through the story and said, “Serves her right, you know. She only pays her cleaning lady about ten bucks a week and the poor lady cleans everyday almost.” The messages my participants convey through English carry symbolic power on two levels. First, these messages serve to undercut the dominant discourse by telling the flip-side. Second, it is done in English, a language of power and prestige in Mexico. However, those doing the telling are the children of yesterday’s rural working poor. These participants show the same resistance, albeit symbolically, to the dominant social order in Mexico that their parents had physically rebelled against by immigrating years ago.

This resistance to the dominant social order and the discourse of blaming the rural poor for their poverty because of their low intelligence, lack of commitment to education, and all around backwardness comes through in the stories these participants tell about their parents. These “hero” stories serve to illustrate how their parents indeed possess the very attributes that the working poor are said to lack. For example, Nora takes great pride in telling how her father, who never attended school and does not know how to read and write, corrected the architect who designed the second story of her brother’s home in Lerdo.

Nora: So my brother thought he was being all fancy by hiring un arquitecto, pero mi apá told el arquitecto that the stairs were laid out wrong. Claro, el arquitecto no le hizo caso. But the stairs had to be redone because mi apá was right. Imagine that, mi apá que ni sabe leer, knew more than un arquitecto with a college degree. {So my brother though he

was being all fancy by hiring an architect, but my dad told the architect that the stairs were laid out wrong. Of course, the architect didn't pay any attention to him. But the stairs had to be redone because my dad was right. Imagine that, my dad who doesn't even know how to read, knew more than an architect with a college degree.}

In other words, Nora's father is highly intelligent and self-educated, capable of out-performing even those with college degrees. All of these transnational participants have stories such as Nora's, each expressing an alternative view as a way of counteracting the one which blames the victim for his or her poverty and lack of formal education. The denigration of the working poor by the middle and upper classes puts these participants in a contradictory position. They have a middle class lifestyle today, yet they see themselves as the children of yesterday's working poor. To become a completely accept themselves as members of the Mexican middle class would be to accept a negative portrayal of their parents. So instead, these participants have carved out a third space in which their parents are heroes who have overcome impossible odds with only their rural working class values to guide them. It is this third space, complete with their parents' rural working class values or *valores del rancho* that these participants seek to pass on to their own children. Of course, even these traditional values have a transnational twist.

VALORES DEL RANCHO: THE IMPORTANCE OF HARD WORK

These participants highly value the lessons they received from their rural working class parents. They make frequent mention of how lazy and corrupt the

Mexican middle class is in contrast to their own hard-working parents who had been given no advantages and, therefore, earned their way to economic success through their own unending toil in the U.S. It is this same labor that enabled these participants to far exceed their own parents' education levels. Yet while my participants seem to take it as a given that their children will attend university and vow to do anything to ensure that goal, they are also surrounded by the fruits of their parents' manual labor and feel the need to pass on their parents' *valores del rancho*, which involves an obsession with the importance of hard work.

“Hard work” in their minds includes a willingness or ability to perform manual or menial labor. Although none of these participants has ever worked menial or manual labor jobs in Mexico, all but Carely has done so at some point in the U.S. My participants see their willingness to perform working class labor should the need arise as valuable skill which the Mexican middle class lacks. For example, none of these participants employ *señoras* (servants) in their homes, which is fairly standard for middle class Mexicans. In the following excerpt, Nora is criticizing a couple who rents a house from her father. Rosie is a housewife and her husband Marcos is a mid-level manager at a *maquiladora* in Lerdo. Both have college degrees.

Nora: God, it doesn't make sense. Rosie doesn't have kids, she doesn't work, but she still has to have a señora come in to do the housework. They're renting, for God's sake, they don't even have their own house, but they have a señora. It's all show. My mom had kids, worked in the fields and did her own damn housework. Maybe if Rosie and Marcos quit wasting money trying to look good, they would be able to afford their own house.

Like Nora, these participants believe that employing domestic help is “a waste of money” and perform all domestic tasks as their own working class mothers had done. Thus, it seems the disdain for manual labor and practical skills which Canak and Swanson (1998, p. 60) described as being characteristic of middle class and elite Mexicans is not at all characteristic of these transnationals. Even Elvira, who is very conscious of the fact that she holds a “desk job” in Mexico and chose not to join her sister at Luby’s cafeteria in Texas even though she would earn more, has told her *ingeniero* {engineer} fiancé that while she is willing to live in the U.S. and work “flipping burgers” in order to save money to start a business in Rancho del Valle, she is not willing to join him in Monterrey.

The importance of hard work is a lesson passed on to them by their parents, and they in turn are obsessed with passing this same lesson onto their children. In the following excerpt, Laura is discussing her decision to place her son in public school against the wishes of her middle-class Mexican husband. Oddly enough, Laura’s parents had used their financial resources earned in the U.S. to send Laura to private *colegio* in Mexico.

Laura: Look, I teach in las escuelas publicas {public schools} and I know how bad some of them can be. I mean teachers that don’t teach, books that don’t arrive, not enough desks, broken windows, you name it. But I also went to el colegio and teach in el colegio and I don’t want my son to be like those kids.... Well, most of them are rich, spoiled brats if you ask me. They think they are so special because their parents are rich. They think they don’t have to work hard. And I want my son to know about hard work.

Mary: But you went to el colegio, too.

Laura: Yeah, but I had my parents as roles, ¿cómo se llaman?
{What are they called?}

Mary: Role models.

Laura: Yeah. Role models. And even though we had money, we were never part of high society Montemayor. And I don't want my son to be like that. I want him to be a hard worker.

In this small way, Laura seeks to keep her son away from the bad influence of what she views as lazy, affluent Mexicans. Of course, she also used her husband's *palancas* {connections} to get their son into the best public school in Montemayor and she supplements his education at home with what she believes is lacking in both public and private schools.

This dichotomy between their own hardworking working class parents and lazy, middle-class Mexicans is particularly well developed in the case of Laura, which is understandable given her personal history. Laura had married up in social class, a marriage that was opposed by her husband's family. As a result, her husband's family "cut him off" in the early years of their marriage, and he was forced to seek employment outside of his family's business. This led them to live with Laura's parents in Texas, where her husband found employment as a manual laborer. Laura states that one of the most difficult things about living in the U.S. with her husband is the fact that "he was not used to working so hard,"

which she understands as a lack of ability or willingness to perform working class labor.

Laura is not alone; I heard about the importance of being a hard worker time and time again from my participants which usually contains a component that sets middle class Mexicans up to be lazy.

Nora: I don't want Eva [her daughter] to go to that private colegio because private school kids think they are better than everyone else. Sometimes their families have even less money than we do, but tienen prestigio, tienen el apellido, son miembros del casino {they have prestige, they have the right last name, they're members of an elite social club}. And my daughter needs to learn how to work hard. That's what I want for her. I want her to remember that she comes from el rancho.

Lidia: It was funny at el colegio. Like there were lots of kids who didn't do shit because their parents had money. But my parents taught us that we had to study hard and if we didn't they said they would make us work at some crap job like they did and see how we liked that.

Carely: Some of the mis compañeras {female classmates} didn't do anything at prepa. They said they expected to casarse bien {marry well}, but my mom always said that a woman has to know how to work hard to support herself and her children por si acaso {just in case}.

Obviously, these participants make a clear distinction between themselves and non-transnational, middle class Mexicans. They are hard workers because their parents are hard workers. They have middle class status in Mexico now

because of their parents' hard work in the U.S. and these participants' children or future children also stand to benefit from this higher class status. However, they do not want these children to become what these participants view as "typical" middle class Mexicans. In their minds, knowing how to work hard will enable their children to survive.

It must be noted that these participants are also highly critical of the work habits of Anglos. However, these participants do not make any class distinctions with respect to this group. Instead, Anglos as a whole are considered to be lazy and reluctant to perform working class labor. Jokes about how the U.S. would fall apart without hard-working Mexicans are relatively frequent. However, since these participants are living in Mexico, most of their sharpest criticism is directed at the Mexican middle class.

This third space they have carved themselves in Mexico is a space which spans the border between classes, much like they and their families span the border between U.S. and Mexico. These participants are neither wholly middle-class nor working-class. Yet, I have seen them interact as "natives," switching from the world of middle class professionals in Mexico to that of their working class relatives from Mexico and the U.S. I struggle as I try to describe how these participants view themselves and their families because it does not fall into traditional categories of either/or, nor is it bound by the demarcation of a particular nation-state. Yet, it is into this same third space that these participants seek to socialize their own children.

VALORES DEL RANCHO: THE VALUE OF MONEY IN THE LONG TERM

The value of money in the long term is another of the *valores del rancho* which these transnational participants view as an integral part of lessons their parents passed on to them and which they seek to transmit to their children. I have seen a good deal of long-range planning going on among these participants. Money is saved and/or invested with the future in mind. There are no get-rich-quick schemes, but rather slow and steady progress towards a given goal. All participants attribute their financial prowess to their parents. They spend wisely, avoid fads, constantly save, and invest for the future.

It is certainly a contradictory picture to the one summarized by Valdés (1996). In characterizing the working class families living in colonia along the El Paso/Ciudad Juarez border, she states “Like the Mexican-American families studied by Evans and Anderson (1973), the families in this study tended to be fatalistic and present-time oriented (p. 192).” Although the parents of these participants would seem to have been rather like the ones of the families described by Valdés in that they were all members of the rural marginalized poor in Mexico, long-range planning and investing based on realistic goals was very much a part of their lives in the U.S. Money had been saved to build houses one room at a time in Mexico, to purchase lots for their children, and pay for their education. All but one set of parents also purchased or built homes in the U.S. The value of money with an eye to the future must have been an integral part of the childhood socialization of these participants because it is hard to imagine how their parents could have amassed what they had on working class wages, even in

the U.S. It would seem that “fatalistic” and “present-time oriented” was never part of the picture. In turn, it is not part of the picture for their children, my participants. They work, save and invest for the future much as their parents had done.

As a whole, these participants see themselves as wiser than most Americans because of the lessons taught by their parents. All are highly critical of rampant consumerism in the U.S.

Elvira: Pues, allá hay mucha presión. You know, to buy, buy, buy, todo nuevo, todo de marca. Pero aprendimos de nuestros apás que es mejor ahorrar poquito a poquito para el futuro. {Well, over there, there is a lot of pressure. You know, to buy, buy, buy, everything new, everything with a brand name But we learned from our parents that it is better to save little by little for the future.}

They also tend to be critical of the Mexican middle class for the same reason.

Lidia: People buy stupid shit here if they have money, just like the U.S. Like some of my friends from the colegio, always wanting to go shopping at the fancy malls in Monterrey. Stuff is like half the price at malls in the States, but I still don't go there because it is a waste of money. Mis apás built all this [waving her hand around the house] and bought a house in Chicago and bought land for us here in Mexico. All that on the crappy wages they earned in the States, well, they would have been lucky to earn enough to buy food here in Mexico, but anyway, I think I learned good from them. Like some of my friends here, they don't know what it is like to work hard for your money and how if you just avoid temptation you will be able to have something really valuable to show for all your hard work. I think it is their parents' fault; mine were different. Save something today, even a dime, and little by little you will have something to show for it.

As the above comments illustrate, the value of money in the long term in combination with hard work, is seen as an integral part of their childhood socialization and a valuable asset. In their minds, both Americans and middle class Mexicans spend far too much money on frivolous purchases with limited long-term value. These participants believe their parents are wizards with a dollar or a peso and take pride in the fact that they too have learned “economics” from the best of all scholars: their parents trained in the school of life. However, the school is very much a transnational one.

Cautious spending, which these participants see as coming from their parents’ traditional *valores del rancho*, has been nurtured and developed by the transnational experience. In other words, while their parents were indeed very conscious of the value of money when they left Mexico because they did not have any, immigration to the U.S. added a new dimension to the value. Despite their criticisms of conspicuous consumption, these participants certainly do not seem to lacking anything. I must admit I am amazed at what these transnational families have been able to amass. Frankly, they have a lot of “stuff”, often more than I saw in non-transnational, middle class Mexican homes. Transnational is the key here because the constant back and forth movement of across the border by members of these families have enabled those in Mexico to obtain the trappings of a middle class life style much more economically than those Mexicans who do not have such connections. Most clothing, books, toys, appliances, and so forth, are purchased at flea markets and yard sales or collected from dumpsters by these participants themselves or by their relatives in the U.S.

Carely: Gringos throw away better shit than you can buy new here in Mexico. And I'm not proud. I don't care if it is used or not.

Carely is correct; most manufactured goods are more expensive in Mexico and often seem to be of inferior quality. Furthermore, as someone who has furnished apartments with garage sale items and dumpster finds, I have noticed that people in the U.S. discard perfectly usable items. However, even I do not have the consumer skill these participants have. They are quick to assess the quality of both new and used items at a glance. They seem to know exactly what to buy and where to buy it on both sides of the border.

I saw the "great consumer exchange" between these participants and their U.S. based relatives on numerous occasions. Orders for clothing, appliances, food items etc. are often "placed" by phone to these relatives and arrive whenever these relatives come for a visit. Such goods are then exchanged for tortillas, dried meat, cleaning products, and the like which are either more expensive to buy or considered of inferior quality in the U.S. Nora's brothers go so far as to finance their trips to Mexico by collecting items in the U.S. from flea markets, garage sales or dumpsters, transporting them to Mexico in a trailer, and selling them there after Nora and her father are offered first pick. Friends and neighbors often stop by Nora's house to ask when her brothers would be bringing more merchandise. The proceeds earned by her brothers from these sales usually more than cover the cost of the trip.

The economic benefits of transnationalism extend beyond the exchange of consumer goods. As citizens or permanent residents of the U.S. these participants

keep late model vehicles registered in the U.S. and drive across the border to the U.S. every six months in order to acquire a new tourist visa and temporary vehicle importation permit. In this way, they can avoid high import duties in Mexico until the vehicle is old enough to be registered in Mexico at a nominal cost. While for most purposes, they live in Mexico as Mexican citizens with Mexican birth certificates, they always keep their U.S. passports or green cards and tourist visas handy when driving in Mexico, just in case they are stopped by Mexican transit authorities. Without such proof of tourist status, Mexican authorities can seize such vehicles as illegally imported. It is a “trick” learned from and practiced by their parents. These participants display incredible knowledge of import fees and have found various ways to use their unofficial “dual nationality” to their advantage. “Unofficial” means that while none has taken advantage of dual nationality which Mexico extended to U.S. citizens in 1998, they all keep two sets of papers which had been acquired long before the option of dual nationality became available. In other words, they and/or their parents had found creative ways to bridge the physical and legal borders between the U.S. and Mexico years ago.

While these participants are certainly cautious with money, they are by no means cheap and are often willing to pay more for certain items in Mexico if the purchases are cost effective and the items represent a worthwhile investment. Education had been a top priority for their parents, who had willingly invested their hard-earned money in furthering their children’s education. Consequently, my participants see computers to be worthwhile investment because they are seen

as directly related to education. All of the participants have computers in their homes. Yet, I found that most non-transnational, middle class Mexicans I came into contact with in these rural areas do not. Elvira's parents had purchased one when Elvira was in *secundaria* in Mexico because although she had classes in *computación*, the *secundaria* did not have any computers. Laura had purchased one for her son because he had used them in elementary school in the U.S. and she wants him to continue to develop computer skills in Mexico. Carely and Nora had purchased them to help with their education degrees, but they also acquired software for their own very young children because they want them to "grow up with computers like they do al otro lado." Lidia's family had bought one to further the education of family members currently living in Mexico.

I originally assumed that these computers had been purchased in the U.S., where computers are less than half the price in Mexico. However, I soon found out that these participants or their parents had purchased their computers in Mexico. On the surface, this did not seem to jibe with my impression of them as "super shoppers" who are always on the lookout for the best deal. However, their explanations as to why they spent twice as much illustrated the depth of their consumer savvy and transnational awareness.

Nora: Computers are different. Like a fridge is a fridge on both sides of the border and they have been around for a long time in Mexico. So somebody here can fix a fridge from the U.S. because they have a lot of practice with fridges and a fridge is basically the same thing no matter where it is bought. But computers, well, they are pretty new at least here in Mexico and most people don't know that much about them. And they are specialized and also dependent on language, like you know those mensajes {messages}

that come up when you do something wrong. If I had a U.S. computer, everything would be in English, like the manual, the error messages y todo eso {and all that}. And to tell you the truth, I don't know what that means in English or Spanish. But I can find someone here who does know what it means in Spanish, like el ingeniero [a neighbor who is computer engineer]. And if I buy it from someone here in Lerdo I know they can fix it because they are more familiar with the Mexican ones like Alaska [a brand name common to Mexico]. And you can't patch together a computer with duct tape and string and parts from other computers like you can with a fridge. And I can't be hauling a big-ass computer over to the States every time something goes wrong. So I figured even though computers are a lot more expensive here, it would be a better value in the long run because I could be sure that I would get help when I needed it.

Once again, these participants know exactly what constitutes good value in the long term, even if the initial purchase price is considerably more expensive in Mexico. Of course, they all tend to get frequent calls from their middle-class friends and neighbors in Mexico who have purchased electronic goods in the U.S. only to discover they cannot figure out how to work them because the instructions and buttons are in English. Questions regarding VCR's, television sets, sewing machines and microwaves are easily fielded because these participants have considerable experience with these items in English. But computers are still too unknown in any language. One of Carely's colleagues at *la Normal* {teacher training school} eventually ended up taking his laptop back to the store in the U.S. because no one, including Carely, could decipher the manual. Such experiences serve to reinforce these participants' understanding that some things, like computers, should be purchased in Mexico, even if they are more expensive in the short term.

Their parents' economic lessons extend to the way these participants save money, which also reflects transnational knowledge. Although the peso has been relatively stable in recent years and the dollar actually fell slightly against the peso during the time I was in Mexico, these participants save the bulk of their money in dollars rather than pesos. They all have bank accounts in the U.S. They have bank accounts in Mexico too, but these contain limited balances and are primarily used for life's necessities rather than as savings accounts. Whenever a relative comes to visit, they change pesos for dollars and either deposit the money when they themselves go to the States or send the money back with their relatives to be deposited in U.S. banks. This activity of changing and transferring money was particularly feverish when the economic situation exploded in Argentina in 2001. The general sense among these participants was that Mexico would be next and the value of the Mexican peso would plummet much like the Argentine peso had. While they didn't necessarily understand the complicated economic analysis offered by Mexican media sources, they have a ground level understanding of volatility of the Mexican economy based on past history. Nora's father Don José stated, "El peso, como el pinche gobierno mexicano, no sirve para nada." {The peso, like the damn Mexican government, isn't worth anything.} Don José has been living in Mexico since he retired almost twenty years ago, yet he still carries more dollars than pesos in his pocket. He still thinks that in the long term dollars are a safer investment.

Although they learned from their parents that the peso was never to be trusted, they learned about the U.S. banking system along side their parents.

Some had translated for their parents and helped them negotiate the system when they were still children. I was often astounded by the depth of their knowledge. They obviously understood the ins and outs of ATM cards long before ATM's even existed in rural Nuevo Leon. When ATM's did arrive, many changed their banks in the U.S. to ones that have the lowest service charge for withdrawing money in Mexico. Not only do they have savings accounts in the U.S., some have checking accounts and credit cards for emergencies there because they believe that those things are a necessary part of life in the U.S. Personal checking accounts are rare in these areas of Mexico, and credit of any kind in Mexico is subject to extremely high interest rates. Their U.S. credit card bills and bank statements go to their siblings' or parents' addresses in the U.S., which also enables those who have permanent resident status to "prove" they are still living in the U.S., since officially they are not supposed to be living outside of the country for more than six months. All in all, they show great skill at negotiating financial matters on both sides of the border.

Yet, their long-term perspective keeps them from spending money they do not already have. These transnational families do not borrow money from banks on either side of the border. Interest payments, even at the lower rates available in the U.S., are still regarded as a waste of money. Instead, when they need to raise funds quickly, it is not unusual for family members to live with other family members in the U.S. and work two jobs because even minimum wage jobs in the U.S. pay more than they earned in Mexico, and living with relatives enables them to save the bulk of their earnings. For example, when Laura and her husband

wanted to begin construction on their own home on the lot Laura's parents had bought for her years before, they returned to the U.S. again and worked for two years while staying with Laura's parents in Texas in order to save on expenses and amass the starter capital. Elvira did the same during the summer in order to save for a car. In this way, laboring in the U.S. has become their primary lending institution when they need more cash than they are able to save from their earnings in Mexico.

VALORES DEL RANCHO: COMMITMENT TO FAMILY

Finally, commitment to family is one of the most important *valores del rancho* that these participants feel they have learned from their parents. Family could always be depended upon for emergency loans, child care, housing and during times of illness. Much has been written on the importance of family to those of Mexican origin on both sides of the border (Montiel, 1973; Becerra, 1988; Valdés, 1996; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). Yet, in these families, this commitment to family is very much tied to the transnational experience and therefore what has developed is a family network that transcends the physical border. Border crossing is an integral part of their family life experience and family solidarity is maintained across the border. However, commitment to family does not imply parents and children always living together in the same place. All of these participants had been separated from their parents at various points during their lives. Carely had been raised by her grandparents and an aunt and uncle. She never really lived with her mother for an extended period of time after the first six months of her life. However, her mother visits

fairly regularly and Carely, like her two older sisters had done before her, plans to relocate to Houston at least for a while where her mother currently lives. Elvira spent most of her childhood in Rancho del Valle while her parents worked in the Central Texas, but at age five when amnesty settled their legal status, she began spending every summer in the U.S. Lidia and her siblings had been sent back to Turco on more than one occasion to live with their grandparents when her father was laid off because children could be maintained on less money in Mexico, and childcare was readily available. They also often spent summers with their grandparents while their parents remained in the U.S. Laura lived with her parents in the U.S. and later in Montemayor until age 12, but after that her father returned to the States to work and her mother divided her time between the U.S. and Mexico. Laura and her brothers, however, would spend the summers in the U.S. Nora said that her older brothers basically raised her because her parents often went to other parts of California following the crops. She decided to remain in Lerdo at age fourteen with her sister and sister-in-law while her parents and brothers returned to California. Most of the participants commented on the “naturalness” of frequent separations.

Elvira: Mis apás would come here to Mexico a couple of times a year before Amnestía. After that, pues, they would come here and we would go there. That is just the way life was. A lo mejor {maybe}, it seems strange for some people, pero para nosotros, no {but not for us}.

Lidia: It was like, actually it is like, having two homes: one in Turco, one in Chicago. I mean parents, grandparents, what’s the difference?

Laura: That's just the way it was. We just like were used to not having our parents here all the time. And we always spent the holidays and summers together. Like Christmas in Montemayor and summers in Houston. To me, both places are really home.

Thus, separation and border crossing seem very normal to them and border crossing is still the norm. If separation from their parents had caused any anxiety in these participants when they were children, they do not talk about it. Instead, they believe that their parents had their best interests in mind. Immigration and separation were part of the sacrifices their parents had made to ensure that their children had a better life. Lidia's comments are fairly typical of how these participants feel about their parents' commitment to family.

Lidia: Ni mi amá ni mi apá {neither my mom nor my dad} had the chance to even finish elementary school. They had to go to work when they were still little kids. And they never wanted that to happen to us. They wanted us to have a childhood and we did even if they weren't always around. You know, people talk a lot about family values, especially in the U.S. But if you ask me, my parents que son del rancho {who are from the rural working class} could teach everyone what it means to be a family.

Like Lidia, none of these participants ever had to work as children. In contrast, all of their parents (except for Carely's mother) were forced by economic circumstances to leave or never begin *primaria* in order to work. Furthermore, their parents often supported not only their own children, but other family members in Mexico. These participants seem to evaluate their childhood

years as very fortunate because their parents made the ultimate sacrifice by immigrating and thus to ensuring a better life for their children and those left behind. In their minds, a family is no less a family when separated by a border and home is determined by the presence of family. Of course, none of these participants could imagine being separated from their own children for extended periods of time, but then again they do not have the same economic need their parents did.

Geographical proximity is important to this family solidarity, but it was geographical proximity with a transnational twist. Two home bases have been established, one in the U.S. and one in Mexico. Family members live near each other in one home base or the other and some members float back and forth between the two. All siblings, but one, from all of these participants' families live near other siblings and/or parents either in the one particular place in the U.S. or the place of family origin in Mexico. Out of five sets of parents and twenty eight children there is only one exception to this dual home base norm. Nora's brother Artemio continues to live in California in the family's first home base in the U.S., while the rest of his siblings in the U.S. live in the same place in Texas, where they all relocated en mass in order to be within a day's drive to the place of origin in Mexico where their parents retired. In contrast to his other siblings, Artemio is also the only one who did not marry either someone from Lerdo or someone with transnational ties to Lerdo. His wife is a transnational from Michoacán. Artemio's separation from both the home base in Lerdo and the one in Texas is seen as his wife's fault because he, his wife, and their children live

close to her family's home base in California. It would appear that this does cause him some discomfort. In the year that I lived in Lerdo, Artemio visited both Texas and Lerdo three times, twice without his wife. He stated longingly on more than one occasion that would like to retire in Lerdo, but said that his wife would not be happy there.

The idea that "home" exists on both sides of the border pervaded the data as is evident in some of the previous comments. However, most participants spoke of the existence of individual preferences among some members of the family for one side of the border or the other. Economic considerations serve to override individual preferences however. Earning a living in rural Nuevo Leon is just not possible for most. Some family members have tried to start businesses in Mexico, but a steady paycheck is more dependable than relying on the relative instability of the Mexican economy, particularly in these rural areas. Furthermore, Social Security is considered worth holding out for, since it would enable one to live relatively well, at least in Mexico.

Nora has a particular take on the individual preferences of family members that bears citing because it sheds light on the transnational concept of having two homes in two different countries. Most of the participants allude to belonging and missing both places, although not as succinctly as Nora.

Nora: I want to live in the States now because I live in Lerdo. My brothers and sisters want to live in Lerdo because they live in the States. When they come to Mexico to visit, it is all about Mexico lindo y querido {beautiful and beloved}. But they don't work here and when they are here it is a vacation for them. Well, I don't live in the States so when I go it is vacation. I don't have to work there like they don't have to work here. Mexico isn't so lindo y querido {beautiful and

beloved} if you got to work here and I suppose that the U.S. isn't so hot if you have to work there. I guess everybody in my family misses what they don't have. I mean even my dad hops a bus and goes to the States every month or so. I guess all of us just want to have both, Mexico and the States.

Certainly, all of these participants mention missing what they do not have at the moment. Regardless of whether a given family member is based in the U.S. or Mexico, trips back and forth between the two home bases are frequent. Travel expenses are seen as another worthwhile investment because the maintenance of family ties across the border is, much like education, a top priority for their parents and as a result for my participants. A plane ticket to Chicago might be expensive, but the long term value of the visit is immeasurable. Family ties are continually renewed via this movement back and forth; the presence of a strong family network remains constant on both sides of the border.

This importance of living near family is also evidenced by the fact that even if an individual prefers Mexico to the U.S., none of these participants nor their family members have ever lived in another part of Mexico, although there are probably more economic opportunities in large cities such as Monterrey, especially if one is fluent in English. This is particularly well illustrated with respect to Elvira. She definitely prefers Mexico to the U.S., but while she is willing to live among family in Texas, she refuses to join her fiancé in Monterrey. The external border between Rancho del Valle and Texas is not much of border because the presence of family on the other side means Texas is also home. But the internal border between Rancho del Valle and Monterrey cannot be easily

crossed. The absence of family means Monterrey is “foreign” and would never be home.

CONCLUSION

These participants appear to live in a constant state of negotiation, of ambiguity, of divided and contradictory loyalties. Yet, they do not seem to have a difficult time living it or at least not to the extent of wishing it were not so. These participants span internal class borders in Mexico and external national borders. Their transnational experiences appear to color all aspects of their lives. They have middle class life styles now in Mexico, but they would have been yesterday’s *niños del rancho* had their parents not left Mexico. The *valores del rancho*, which they see as traditional and believe have been passed on by their parents, have in actuality been redefined and negotiated based on transnationalism. These participants seek to pass their transnational understanding, nurtured on both sides of the border, on to their own children or future children. Since transnationalism has been and continues to very much a part of their family lives, it is important that their children develop the same skill of negotiation.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the major descriptive findings of this study, provide implications for theory and research, and offer practical suggestions for the U.S. educational context. In first two sections, I summarize the key findings relating to the research questions. First, I review the main themes that emerged as these participants described, compared, and contrasted their educational experiences on both sides of the border. Then, I highlight the principal ways in which the transnational understandings of these participants unfold in their personal and professional lives in Mexico. In the third section, I discuss the inherent difficulties involved in conducting research on transnationalism, with an eye to developing a holistic framework for researchers interested in the subject. In the next two section, I relate the findings of this study to the U.S. educational context by providing pedagogical suggestions for educators. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of my fears regarding this study.

EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDER

As adults, my participants reflect on their schooling experiences from past, present, and future vantage points. In the past, they were students in both U.S. and Mexican schools, which involved transitions between two school worlds. In the present, they are teachers in Mexican schools, and the battles they are fighting are Mexican battles. Their future perspective relates to their role as parents who are actively planning the educational path of their children.

Racial/ethnic divisions appear to have been the most troubling aspect of their school days in the U.S. It is the most prominent and frequent theme among all five participants. Although most have noted a tendency for students to self-segregate, all are most disturbed by school policies which they believe serve to separate students of color from white students. Laura questions why only African American and Mexican origin children needed remedial pull-out classes. She is so disturbed by this that she refused to allow her own son to be pulled from the regular classroom for ESL instruction. Nora has largely erased her unhappy middle school years from her memory, but she does remember that “White kids had their own classes,” which separated her from her elementary school friends. Lidia asserts that while there are divisions and tensions between African American and Mexican origin students, Anglos “are even more racist because they won’t go to school” with either Mexican origin or African American students. Evidence of institutionalized forms of racism in U.S. schools has been documented in the literature. (Valencia, 2002; Pearl, 2002)

There appears to be a qualitative difference between the types of racial and ethnic tensions described by older participants and those described by younger ones. First, older participants report attending majority white schools, while younger participants describe attending schools made up almost entirely of students of color. These characterizations are in agreement with recent data reported by the Civil Rights Project of Harvard University, which documented the increasing segregation of students of color in the past twenty years (Orfield & Yun, 1999).

Second, younger participants appear to be most bothered by the divisions *within* the Mexican-origin student group. Such divisions are never mentioned by the older participants. The younger participants use a variety of terms to describe such divisions, “old Mexicans” versus “new Mexicans”, “Mexican Americans” versus *mojaditos* {wetbacks}, and so forth. All participants acknowledge that the roots of these divisions originate, in part, on the Mexican side of the border, with the negative stereotyping of *pochos*. As Lidia stated, “The new ones come in already hating us, the old ones, you know like Mexican Americans.” However, it would appear that school policies often serve to reinforce these divisions. This is true even if the policy in question (like Texas’ Ten Percent Law or bilingual education programs) was designed to help Mexican origin students. It is not surprising that the increasingly negative climate for immigrants in the U.S. (Suárez-Orozco, 1998; Macedo & Bartolomé, 1998; Trueba, 1999; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) would manifest itself in the school system. Once again, Lidia aptly captured the depth of the anti-immigrant, anti-Mexican sentiment and its effect on the Mexican origin student body: “I think the problem is that everybody hates Mexicans these days. So maybe we old Mexicans try not to be like Mexicans, so people don’t hate us.”

Social class is viewed as the defining factor of Mexican schools. The working class parents of my participants, with their migra-dollars, were able to provide their children with a middle class education in Mexico, most frequently in private schools. Despite the fact that their parents had little familiarity with the education system in Mexico, they did know that money could be used to further

their children's education. Laura noted that her parents, "sort of caught on that if you have any money at all, you send your kids to private school. So since they had had money, we went to el colegio." These parents, most of who had little or no formal education in Mexico, willingly paid in order to provide their children with the highest quality of education possible.

Although most of my participants attended private schools in Mexico, they are currently working as teachers in Mexican public schools. They see themselves as the children of yesterday's rural marginalized poor, who have only risen in social class as a result of their parents' immigration. For this reason, they often strongly identify with the poorest of their public school students. Nora's comment about one of her students is telling: "Did you see that skinny, little girl with the sad eyes and messed up clothes? She was me. She was me. I thank God everyday that my parents left."

All participants are painfully aware of the injuries of class suffered by their poor students and are deeply troubled by every aspect of the public schools that serve the most marginalized children. They frequently comment on the poor condition of the physical plants, which reflects the fact that the *Padres de Familia* {parents' association} has few resources to devote to upkeep and repairs. These participants are bombarded with comments by their fellow teachers about poor children's supposed lack of intelligence. "Es que son niños del rancho y no tienen la capacidad para los estudios," {It's that they are children of the rural poor who don't have the ability for studying} is a mantra repeated *ad nauseam*.

My participants have never been poor in Mexico, but their parents were *del rancho* {from the rural poor class} and they see themselves as yesterday's *niños del rancho* {children of the rural poor class}. Time and time again, my participants commented that the children with the greatest needs consistently receive the poorest quality of education. Such children usually have the most overworked and/or uncommitted teachers and attend schools which lack even the most basic resources. Consequently, such children have little hope of escaping their marginalized class position. As Lidia stated when comparing the life chances of a poor person in the U.S. to one in Mexico, "There maybe only a little chance to get ahead there, but at least there's a chance. Aquí no hay nada. {Here there is nothing.} If you are born poor, you die poor, punto y aparte" {period, end of story}.

For most of my participants, the transition between different school systems in two different countries was particularly traumatic. This trauma had both emotional and institutional dimensions. Although institutional barriers which threatened their academic success existed on both sides of the border, the parents of those participants who made the transition from the U.S. to Mexico were able to overcome such obstacles via their increased economic resources by placing their children in private schools, hiring tutors, and so forth. In contrast, the parents of those who made the transition from Mexico to the U.S. could do little to help their children. Lack of familiarity with the U.S. school system and a greater degree of faith in U.S. institutions led these parents to believe that their children were in good hands.

Emotional costs also appeared to have been very high and there was little that their parents were able to do to ameliorate them. This is particularly true of those who made the transition from the U.S. to Mexico. Branded as “Mexican” in the U.S., when they returned to Mexico they soon discovered that they were not viewed as Mexican at all. For some, their *pocho* Spanish tagged them as outsiders, and negative stereotypes about “Americanized Mexicans” hampered their integration into Mexican peer groups. Those who made the transition from Mexico to the U.S. also experienced a sense of alienation and loneliness. They do not, however, speak at great length on this, nor with the same degree of pain. In part, this may be due to two factors. First, those who made the transition from the U.S. to Mexico are in the position of constantly reliving the trauma as they see similar scenarios play out among their own transnational students. Second, those who made the transition from Mexico to the U.S. see a direct economic reward. As Elvira stated, “Gracias a estar allá, tengo mi trabajo. Aprendí bien el inglés y ya tengo mi trabajo.” {Thanks to being there, I have my job. I learned English well and I have my job already.} Thus, the memory of the emotional trauma is blunted by the opportunities that they now have.

My participants acknowledge that neither Mexican nor U.S. schools serve to reinforce the bilingual abilities of transnationals. However, from their position as former students in both countries, their current status as teachers in Mexican schools, and as parents (or future parents), they assert the superiority of U.S. schools in almost all aspects. Resources play a large part in these assessments. The physical comfort of the schooling environment in the U.S., plus the

availability of books, teaching materials, and technology are frequently referenced. Pedagogically, they see U.S. schools as creative, focusing on hands-on learning which is “more of a game” than work. They appreciate the diversity of course offerings such as art, music, and physical education, and the fact that the length of the school day in the U.S. makes such extras possible.

In contrast, my participants see Mexican schools as short on resources. As far as they are concerned, not even Mexican private schools could compare to U.S. public schools in this area. They particularly note the absence of books. As Elvira stated, “I learned to read in Mexico, but I learned to love to read in the U.S. because there are books over there.” Mexican schools are seen as lacking in physical comforts such as heating or air-conditioning. My participants speculate that conditions are probably better in Monterrey, but that rural areas are always shortchanged. With respect to pedagogy, they believe that Mexican schools emphasize rote-learning and leave little room for creative expression. The centralized, national curriculum is also seen as problematic, in that it has little to do with the realities of life in these rural areas. There is an overemphasis on national and state exams and little local control over the educational process. In my participants’ minds, all roads lead to Monterrey and/or Mexico City.

As parents, these participants believe their children would be best served by at least attending elementary school in the U.S. Despite the traumatic transitions many of them experienced and the racialized atmosphere in U.S. schools, they are more than willing to expose their children to these difficulties because they believe that attending elementary school in the U.S. will be better

for their children academically. As Nora tearfully stated in reference to her own daughter, “I want her to go to school where there are lots of books and the teacher will read to her. I want her to be warm and sitting on a carpet. I don’t care if I have to work at McDonald’s. Eva is going to school over there.” All participants have made plans to relocate to the U.S. in order for their children to attend school; Laura had already done so, although her husband’s inability to adapt motivated an early return to Mexico.

Although they are in unison in their praise of U.S. elementary schools, their views on U.S. secondary schools are more ambiguous. They may believe that U.S. secondary schools are superior academically, but other factors come in to play. The sheer size of secondary schools in the U.S. is seen a drawback. Lidia refers to her U.S. high school as a “teen warehouse” where “you are a number, not a person... it is easy to get lost in the shuffle.” These participants are also concerned about negative peer pressure in the U.S., although they tend to assert that U.S. schools are not as bad most Mexicans believe. Their attitude towards having their own children in such schools is a cautious one. After all, superior academic opportunities can be easily cancelled out by negative peer influences.

TRANSNATIONAL UNDERSTANDINGS

The borderlands, or “third space,” which my participants inhabit has multiple dimensions. The third space is at once physical, social, economic, and cultural. My participants’ ability to navigate this complex territory is a source of

pride for them. Their identities seem to have a shifting nature to them which defies facile categorizations. The question, “How do you identify yourself?” prompts Elvira to answer in Spanglish, “I am cien por ciento mexicana, *but...*” {I am one hundred percent Mexican, but...} followed by detailed stories about how she is different from what she calls “Mexican Mexicans.” Or consider Lidia, who replies to the same question, “Depends on who’s asking,” indicating that her answer is contingent upon the social context. It seems that even a hyphenated response is dependent upon where one is located at the time, as in Nora’s assertion, “I’m American-Mexican at least over here in Mexico...I would be Mexican-American in the States...” Trueba (1999b) posited that Latinos in the U.S. have multiple, shifting identities:

Rather, it seems to be a complicated process whereby Latinos retain multiple identities, multiple interactional settings, and diverse “situated selves” at one point in time. They can code-switch from one ethnocultural setting to another and use different linguistic forms and non-verbal behaviors (p. 12).

It appears that their “cousins,” my participants, on the other side of the border are engaged in the same complicated process.

Nowhere is this shifting more evident than in their tri-lingual abilities. The relative ease and frequency with which these participants shift from Spanish to English to Spanglish is striking. They can “pass” as natives whether they are speaking English or Spanish, and yet, often feel most comfortable with Spanglish, if one uses their speech at home as a barometer. Although they are singled out by education officials as *maestras mexicano-americanas* {Mexican-American

teachers}, they also tend to flock together whenever there is more than one of them in a setting. At statewide teachers' meetings in Nuevo Leon, they are easy to spot clustered in clumps; one needs only listen for the English. Non-transnational teachers speak Spanish at these meetings. In part, these rural transnationals speak English because they are aware that they can do so with a facility that other English as a foreign language professionals lack, even if these professionals are "city slickers" and *licenciados* {college educated}. It is an act of defiance which says, as Carely put it, "Los de arriba quieren el inglés que nosotros, los de abajo, ya tenemos." {Those from above want the English that we, those from below, already have.} They know that they possess what others want and they flaunt it. At the same time, they appreciate being in the company of other transnationals who speak "real" English, as they call it. It is comforting to be among those for whom "well, duh" needs no explanation, and "I'munna do it cuzai wanna" does not have to be rendered into the carefully enunciated "I'm going to do it because I want to" in order to be understood.

English is also used as the language of resistance. My participants frequently use it to make sidebar comments that challenge the dominant discourse of class in Mexico. When Elvira's future mother-in-law declared that her *señora* {domestic servant} was stealing from her, Elvira expressed her solidarity with the *señora* by informing me in English that her mother-in-law paid little better than slave wages. Of course, Elvira's own mother had worked as a domestic in the U.S.

During the course of my research in Mexico, I was frequently recruited by my participants as an ally in assertions of *pochó* solidarity. Elvira readily assumed that I have an appreciation for the type of labor that Mexicans on the other side of the border typically perform, while her future mother-in-law, as a member of the “old money” class in Mexico, does not. The same dynamic was at play in the argument at Lulu’s house, where I was immediately recruited in defense of Spanglish. Although my participants have conflicting ideas about the legitimacy of Spanglish, they are not about to allow a non-transnational like Lulu to denigrate it. As these examples demonstrate, both English and Spanglish often function as languages of resistance to the dominant discourses of class and identity in Mexico.

Despite my participants’ mixed feelings about Spanglish, there is a consensus among them that they want their children to develop a strong borderlands consciousness. This was made especially clear in their determination to pass their knowledge of English and U.S. culture onto their children. It is not enough that their children learn to speak English well. It is critical that their children speak *unaccented* English—i.e. that they be recognized in both Mexico and the U.S. as native speakers. While none of my participants speak what would be considered prestige dialects of English, they would be recognized as native speakers in the U.S. This is equally true in Mexico.

Their reasons for wanting their own children to be able to “pass” as native speakers goes beyond its obvious economic value in Mexico. For most, English is a part of their identity and as such they need to pass this on to their children as

part of the parent/child bond. As Nora stated, “English is a part of who I am...I want my daughter to know me and that means she has to know English.” All participants recognize that they are part of a transnational family network. The integrity of that network is dependent upon their children being able to interact with family members on both sides of the border. All of these participants have siblings in the U.S. Visits to the U.S. are frequent, regardless of whether or not these participants themselves intend to live, work or raise their children there. Even ordinary activities, like going to the movies with their cousins in the U.S., will be difficult for these participants’ children if they cannot understand English.

Working on the U.S. side of the border is, in a sense, a family pattern. Their parents had been forced by economic circumstances to leave Mexico, and as a result had been able to better their life circumstances. Their family histories are marked by economic hardship in Mexico. The American dream is a reality for their parents in that working in the U.S. has provided them with social mobility and economic success, albeit in Mexico. Therefore, these participants continue to view immigration as viable option in the event of economic hardship in Mexico. That both they and their parents view Mexico as less economically stable than the U.S. is evident in many ways. It is considered better to have one’s savings in dollars rather than pesos. Social security benefits are a dependable source of retirement income which provide a higher monthly income than that which many working Mexicans earn.

These participants want their children to be able to speak English as part of a contingency plan should relocation to the U.S. become necessary. Based on

their life experiences and that of their relatives, they believe that Americans have a low tolerance for accented English. More doors will be open for their children if they sound like native speakers than if they have a high level of proficiency but non-native pronunciation. Of course, cultural knowledge of the U.S. is considered to be of equal importance. As Laura stated, “I don’t hate it [the U.S.]. Maybe because I know what to say and I know *what to do*. And I want my son to know what to say and what to do over there.

That returning to the U.S. is a contingency plan is also evident in the fact that my participants put a great deal of effort into insuring that their children have the same legal status in the U.S. as they themselves do. Once again, these are transnational families with essentially two home bases. But the ease with which these participants cross the border between nations is certainly more than an issue of legality. As outlined above, successful crossing implies possessing relevant cultural and linguistic knowledge. These participants possess it, and they want their children to have the same degree of skill.

My participants bring their transnational knowledge into their classrooms as well. In contrast to their own teachers of English in Mexico, these participants are able to identify those students who have lived in the U.S. via their “real” English almost immediately. They display a high degree of empathy for these students, particularly those who are engaged in the same difficult transition process they themselves experienced. They provide moral support, validate their linguistic abilities on a daily basis in the classroom, and often give them

alternative assignments or reading materials. Lidia went so far as to demand additional materials from state educational officials.

The transnational knowledge these participants bring to the learning environment extends beyond their dealings with those students with life experiences in the U.S. They bring “real English” to all of their students. From Lidia’s explanation of school lunch programs in the U.S. to Nora’s stressing the importance of answering with “yeah” rather than “yes” when questioned by immigration officials to their substitution of vocabulary words (i.e. a shop became a store), they transform their classes into real world lessons on language and culture.

Thus far, I have focused on the third space in relation to what my participants gained from the time they spent in the U.S. However, it is also important to recognize that they see themselves as having gained an immense amount from their immigrant parents. These gains go far beyond simply economic opportunities. They credit their parents with having passed on fundamental values, beliefs, and life strategies that have contributed to their success in Mexico today. I refer to these parental contributions collectively as *valores del rancho*. While my participants view their parents’ *valores del rancho* as “traditional”, these values and strategies are in fact informed by their parents’ own immigration experiences.

A key component of these *valores del rancho* is the ability and willingness to work hard, particularly at manual labor. Despite the rhetoric glorifying the “common man” that entered Mexican national consciousness as a result of the

Mexican Revolution, the fact is that manual labor and those who perform it are denigrated in these rural areas of Nuevo Leon today. This is the basis of the *gente del rancho* {rural poor people} stereotypes that I found so pervasive. There appears to be a generally held view that the rural working poor are stupid, dirty, lazy, and an obstacle to the nation's progress.

My participants have inverted this dominant discourse, positing their own parents as heroic figures. Through their "hero stories," they draw attention to their parents' intelligence, strong work ethic, and real-world know-how. This discourse of resistance relocates the source of their parents' original poverty in the social and economic injustices inherent in Mexican society, rather than in the alleged shortcomings of the so-called unwashed masses. For example, Don José, Nora's illiterate father, was able to correct the faulty work of a college-educated architect. All my participant have similar hero stories about their own parents.

Hero stories and this discourse of resistance in general are one manifestation of the third space my participants occupy within the Mexican class structure. Although today my participants live middle-class lifestyles, work in middle-class jobs, and operate within middle class professional circles, they are highly critical of what they see as the sloth, decadence, and rampant consumerism characteristic of the established Mexican middle class.

Time and time again, I heard them profess that it is important for their children (or future children) to learn the value of hard work. For example, although Laura had attended private school in Mexico, she refused to place her own son in private school. She fears the corrupting influence of "rich, spoiled

brats,” who “think they are so special because their parents are rich” and “think they don’t have to work hard.” Laura believes that she was able to resist these corrupting influences herself because she had her parents as role models. By training their children to see the value of hard work, they hope to insure a successful future for them regardless of which side of the border they happen to live on.

Once again, the emphasis they place on hard work includes a component which does not devalue manual or menial labor. It is important to note that this type of labor was precisely that which was performed by their parents and is currently being done by their siblings in the U.S. To denigrate manual/menial labor would be to betray their parents and siblings. This willingness to perform manual/menial labor should the need arise is, in my participants’ view, a valuable skill which they feel separates them from the established Mexican middle class.

My participants also draw a distinction between themselves and established Mexican middle class with regard to their respective attitudes towards money. An important aspect of the *valores del rancho* is the idea that money is to be saved or invested over the long term rather than spent to satisfy immediate desires. Actually, my participants are quite vocal in their criticism of the rampant consumerism on both sides of the border.

My participants are certainly not living in poverty. Their houses are spacious and well-equipped, with all the modern conveniences. They have vehicles in good condition which they often kept registered in the U.S. in order to avoid high import fees. To put it in the vernacular, they own a lot of stuff, often

more than many middle class Mexicans. However, they have obtained most of the consumer items they own through their transnational connections. They, their parents, and their siblings in the U.S. are all very savvy consumers. They can accurately assess the quality of both new and used goods at a glance; they know exactly what to buy on which side of the border in order to maximize their buying power. The “great consumer exchange” between these participants and their relatives in the U.S. is an important economic strategy, enabling them to regularly trade goods that are cheap in Mexico for goods that are cheap in the U.S.

These participants are very familiar with the banking systems on both sides of the border. Although the peso has been stable in recent years, they, like their parents, prefer to keep their savings in dollars, which they judge to be a more stable currency in the long term. They continue to view the U.S. as a place where money can be accumulated if they are willing to work more than one job and live in the family’s second home base.

There are two areas in which my participants, like their parents, are willing to spend money because they see doing so as a good long-term investment. First, educational expenses, including the purchase of computers, are of a high priority. Their parents had invested in their education in Mexico, and they do likewise. Second, frequent visits to the home base in the U.S. are important in that they reinforce the transnational family network. As children, their parents made trips to Mexico a priority. Today, these participants give the same priority to frequent visits to the U.S.

Commitment to family is the most important of all the *valores del rancho*. The importance of family goes beyond bonds of love and affection. Family can always be depended upon for emergency loans, help with child care, help in securing housing and employment, and for succor during times of illness. Particularly striking is the fact that my participants' notions of family unity have a distinctly transnational character. Family members may be separated by a border, but it appears that they are always "home" so long as they reside in either their home base in Mexico or its parallel in the U.S. In fact, out of five sets of parents and twenty-eight children, there is only one exception to this dual home base norm. While these participants are willing to relocate from the home base in rural Nuevo Leon to the home base in the U.S., they do not appear to be willing to live anywhere else in either Mexico or the U.S. Elvira is a particularly good illustration of this. She prefers living in Rancho del Valle, but is willing to relocate to second home base in Texas. She is not willing to join her fiancé in Monterrey. In this way, the external border between the U.S. and Mexico is not much of a border at all, while the internal border between Rancho del Valle and Monterrey looms large.

SHIFTING MULTIPLE FRAMES OF REFERENCE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND RESEARCH

Borderlands epistemologies or ways of knowing constitutes an important facet of this study's overarching framework. Borderlands epistemologies may exist far from the actual physical border between nation-states. Primarily developed by Chicano scholars, borderlands epistemologies focuses on people

who live in the symbolic spaces between nation states and cultural systems. Borderlands epistemologies seeks to validate formally marginalized cultural systems and minority world views, and employs them in an effort to better comprehend contemporary realities. Of central interest to scholars of borderlands epistemologies is the fusion or blending of cultural forms that occurs in the cultural borderlands and often times physical borderlands, as well as the new forms that result from that fusion or blending.

Scholars refer to hybridity in describing the fusion of cultural practices, frames of perception, and notions of identity that occur along cultural borderlands. I have opted to reject this term for two main reasons. First, I feel it carries a suggestion of rigidity or fixity. Second, I feel it connotes a simple binary relationship between two parts. Simply put, the term *hybridity* fails to capture the complex, multifaceted, and malleable nature of my participants' understandings of themselves and the world around them. It has also been suggested to me that transnationals might be characterized as having a dual frame of reference with regards to the U.S. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (1995) characterized a dual frame of reference as follows:

Many migrants often consider their lot as having improved from what it was in their country of origin. Because of a perception of relative improvement, many migrants fail to internalize the negative attitudes of the host country toward them, maintaining their country of origin as a point of reference (p. 325)

Like the notion of hybridity, I reject this characterization as inadequate in capturing the complexity, ambiguity, and contradictory nature of the transnational experience.

Instead of making reference to hybridity or a dual frame of reference, I have opted to describe my participants' transnational experiences as having imbued them with *shifting multiple frames of reference*. Once again, this concept must be viewed within a borderlands framework to be fully understood. Shifting multiple frames of reference is a kind of borderlands consciousness, in which my participants' identities and understanding of the world around them is conditioned by their transnational experiences. I use the word *shifting* because these conceptions of self and the world are not static. They change as the participants move between physical locations and cultural spaces. As Nora stated, "I'm American-Mexican at least over here in Mexico...I would be Mexican-American in the States." I use the word *multiple* because although shifting between frames of reference occurs, no frame of reference is ever abandoned entirely. For example, my participants often interact as natives, or "Mexican-Mexicans," among their non-transnational middle class peers. However, as they do so, they are ever conscious of themselves as the children of yesterday's marginalized rural poor.

The second major theoretical strand, the phenomenon of transnationalism, is a prime example of this creative, malleable fusion. Transnationalism describes the outlook, life strategies, and processes of identity formation among individuals, families, and communities whose members have spent substantial periods of time

in different national and/or cultural spaces. Transnationals acquire cultural knowledge and cultural tools from different nation states and cultural spaces, which they weave together to form distinct identities, understandings, and ways of being. Transnationals feel “at home” in multiple places and within multiple cultural systems. They can navigate different physical, social, and cultural spaces with remarkable skill, yet are not subsumed by any one particular space. Transnationalism is more than a simple borrowing or transplanting of cultural forms from one context to another. It is also creative, in that it allows transnationals to develop understandings, life strategies, and identities that, while synthesizing existing forms, are themselves entirely new.

An example of the way transnationalism transforms established forms can be found in the third major theoretical strand, that of cultural capital. Originally developed by Pierre Bourdieu, cultural capital refers to knowledge of and/or familiarity with cultural forms valued by societal elites. According to Bourdieu, those within a given society with access to substantial amounts of cultural capital (usually members of the upper and middle classes) can use it to gain access to high quality education, well compensated employment, and elite cultural circles. This in turn allows them to shore up or advance their economic and social status. Those who lack a valued form cultural capital (i.e. the working classes) are typically denied access to these advantages, and thus see their economic and social standing stagnate or decline over time. In this way, cultural capital functions as a mechanism of social reproduction, recreating the social and economic inequalities that exist in any given society.

Within the context of this study, however, cultural capital acquires a distinctly transnational character. My participants had access to immense reserves of highly valuable cultural capital in the form of native-like English proficiency and knowledge of U.S. culture. In addition, they have been able to use this cultural capital to advance their class positions within Mexico. However, in contrast to Bourdieu's model, none of my participants hail from the middle or upper classes. On the contrary, they are children of the rural marginalized poor whose parents were forced to immigrate to the U.S. by dire economic circumstances. Ironically, as a result of their life experiences in the U.S., my participants have been able to acquire cultural capital which is of immense value within the context of Mexico. At the same time, they retain, respect and seek to pass on the *valores del rancho* of their working class Mexican parents. These *valores del rancho* which my participants see as traditional have been nurtured and developed by the transnational experience. In short, cultural capital as presented in this study needs to be understood as cultural capital with a transnational twist.

Qualitative research as a whole stresses the importance of context, of thick description which contextualizes the experience. This study hammers home the importance of context. My participants are not in the U.S. talking about Mexican schools and society, nor are they in the U.S. talking about U.S. schools and society. They are in Mexico talking about Mexican and U.S. schools and society. Therefore, the battles they are fighting are Mexican battles. If they wax nostalgic about life and school in the U.S. and complain about life and school in Mexico, it

is because Mexico is what they currently see everyday and the U.S. is what they miss. It is Mexico that is the object of their critical gaze and the U.S. is the object of their longing. However, I sense that the critical gaze they now cast on Mexico would manifest itself just as forcefully within the U.S. context. When the battles they are fighting become U.S. battles, I suspect it will be Mexico they look back at with longing.

In sum, had I conducted my research on the U.S. side of the border, I have little doubt that their outlook would have been different. Lidia's "depends who's asking" might well be paraphrased as "depends on *where* one is asking." Context is critical. At present, the literature on immigration and transnationalism is decidedly one-sided. Numerous studies exist documenting the experiences of the children of Mexican immigrants in the U.S. However, this wealth of material is matched by a dearth of research that deals with those individuals who returned to Mexico, and not all of those who return will continue transnational patterns. While I believe my study may serve to help open up some rather sparsely charted territory, it is by itself incomplete. As I have repeatedly asserted throughout the course of this study, the lives of my participants are transnational lives, lived in a third space that transcends national as well as other boundaries. An obvious (and, in my opinion, critical) area for further research would be to study what happens to these same participants when they cross over to *el otro lado* {the other side of the border}. The degree of difference one might find should not be underestimated. I intend to pursue this vein of research when Nora relocates to the U.S. sometime in the next couple of years. I have already spoken with Lidia on

the phone and intend to touch base with her when I return to Chicago. In this way, I hope to continue my study of transnationalism and capture the dynamics of the phenomena in its totality. This implies studying the same participants on both sides of the border because the boundaries of the phenomenon of transnationalism encompass both the U.S. and Mexico.

All of my transnational participants are children of yesterday's marginalized rural poor. However, the experience of transnationalism is by no means confined to this group. My participants spoke at length about members of the established Mexican middle class. They bring their own class biases and limits of perception to their assessment of this group's predispositions, expectations, and adaptive capabilities. We know, however, that a substantial number of middle class Mexicans have also engaged in immigration in response to worsening economic conditions in Mexico. A full appreciation of the phenomenon of transnationalism would require a study of this group. As I have suggested with regards to my own participants, such a study, in order to be complete, would need to encompass their experiences on both sides of the border. Would established members of the Mexican middle class be as adept at carving out and negotiating their own third space? Would their own identities prove as mutable as those of my participants, or would they cling more staunchly to their Mexican identity? Do middle class Mexican transnationals possess similar shifting multiple frames of reference? As one can imagine these, as well as many other questions, suggest a basis for future research.

Another research implication has more to do with my methodological approach. The way in which I entered into this study had a significant affect on the data I was able to obtain. I went into this study with a strong sense of reciprocity and a belief in the importance building of relationships. This was a result of both my own experiences as the subject of research and through my dealings with the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development²⁹. I did not want to treat my participants as subjects, but rather as partners in a mutually beneficial process of discovery. I recognized that my participants are individuals with fully formed lives. They are busy, as any group of working adults with familial and professional responsibilities would be. My first step, therefore, was to ask what I could do to help them, rather than explain what I wanted them to do for me.

This reciprocity played out in practice in several ways. I helped them develop pedagogical practices in accordance with the reality of their classrooms. Those with children asked for my input on effective ways to develop the bilingual abilities of their children. When they asked me to critique their classes (a role which I was uncomfortable with), I instead volunteered to teach while they observed and critiqued me. I provided them with classroom materials that they had been unable to obtain. I served as a de facto lending library and sounding board for the two participants who are studying education.

On a more personal level, I became another link in their transnational network by bringing them items they asked for whenever I crossed the border.

²⁹ For more information regarding the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, please consult the following website: www.llanogrande.org.

Although their relatives in the U.S. visit fairly frequently and do this as well, I joined them in becoming a reliable source of Hot Cheetos, pickles, and Kentucky Fried Chicken. I helped one of the younger participants negotiate the nightmarish bureaucracy at the U.S. consulate in Monterrey by accompanying her and encouraging her to assert her right (as a U.S. citizen) to receive a passport. When one of my participants was seriously injured in a car accident, I extended my stay in Mexico to help take care of her daughter until my participant could walk again.

As a whole, I took a very laid back approach to the research process, letting my participants dictate my timetable rather than imposing my schedule on them. As I stated previously, I was dedicated to reciprocity and the forming of a meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships from the very beginning. In a sense, the research was an outgrowth of this process. Although some might argue that my level of involvement in the lives of my participants exceeded the bounds of traditional research, this approach afforded me a view of their lives that I would not have otherwise been able to attain.

There is another important factor that I believe affected the type of data I was able to obtain, and that was the recognition among my participants that I was a fellow *pocha*. Needless to say, this is a factor that is wholly beyond some researchers' control. However, I believe that had I been an Anglo researcher from the U.S., or even a "Mexican-Mexican," my participants would have been far more reticent in what they were willing to share with me. For example, I would not have been nearly so well positioned to observe English being used as language of resistance. Had I not been *pocha*, my participants might not have

issued sidebar comments to me in English undercutting the dominant discourse of middle-class Mexicans. Although I am not a transnational in the sense that they are, my *pocha* status engendered a degree of solidarity between my participants and me that made this study possible.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SPANISH TEACHERS

I came into this study with a history of teaching Spanish both at the secondary and college level, in which my classes were often filled with Mexican origin heritage language students of vastly different proficiency levels. My prior teaching experience informed my research and helped shape my perspective during the course of this study. While my own study focused on the experiences of transnationals, I believe my findings are more broadly relevant and of particular value to Spanish teachers in the U.S. It appears to me that neither U.S. nor Mexican schools, as institutions, are meeting the needs of their bilingual/bicultural students who are often caught in the third space between nation states. As is evident in my participants' testimony, the subtractive processes described as common to schooling in the U.S. (Cummins, 1984, 1986; Gibson, 1993; Valenzuela, 1999; Bartolomé, 1994), along with negative stereotyping, appear to have a mirror image in the schools my participants attended in Mexico. The implications I provide here for Spanish teachers are designed to inform them and help them address these shortcomings on the U.S. side of the border.

Like my participants, who serve as bridges between cultural and linguistic worlds in their classrooms, Spanish teachers in the U.S. are in the unique position of being able to serve the same function. Unfortunately, most Spanish teachers are prepared to teach Spanish as a *foreign* language. Few are trained to meet the needs of heritage language learners. One of the classic texts used in foreign language teacher preparation, *Teaching Language in Context* (O'Maggio-Hadley, 2001) does not even mention the existence of heritage language learners in the classroom. Nowhere is this gap more pronounced than with regard to Mexican origin students and the teaching of Spanish.

Statistics indicate that the Mexican origin population in the U.S. has grown considerably in recent years. According to U.S. census figures, people of Mexican origin now account for 58% of the U.S. Latino population as a whole (Therrien & Ramírez, 2000). In many areas, particularly in the Southwest U.S., people of Mexican origin account for more than half of the total population. Given the high degree of racial segregation that pervades the U.S. public school system, literally thousands of U.S. high schools now serve student populations that are largely (or, in some cases, nearly all) Mexican origin. Given these facts, the importance of teachers learning to effectively assess and meet the needs of this population cannot be overstated.

The first step would be to recognize the diversity within the Mexican origin population itself. All too often, students of Mexican origin are viewed as a homogeneous group. Even among the second and 1.5 generation of children of immigrants, there is a great deal of diversity. Factors such as the original social

class of these children's parents, their place of origin, whether they come from a rural or urban backgrounds, and the circumstances of their immigration all play powerful roles in shaping these children's outlook, opportunities, and academic prospects.

What has not, in my opinion, been sufficiently appreciated up to this point in time is that many of these divisions have their roots in Mexico rather than in the U.S. That these deep divisions, for example, between urban and rural and between social classes would be manifested in the U.S. would appear to be common sense. In hindsight, I can say that I saw these differences play out in my own classrooms. Certain Mexican origin youth would refer to other Mexican origin youth as *nacos* {low class} and *del rancho* {from poor rural areas}. At a recent ACTFL conference, where I had just finished speaking on Spanish heritage language instruction and the importance of not denigrating the home dialect, I was approached by a woman who was a middle school ESL and Spanish as a heritage language teacher in the U.S. She referred to herself as a former *niña del rancho* and tearfully explained that she was at her wit's end having to deal with what she called "uppity Monterrey kids," who constantly criticized the *niños del rancho* for the way they spoke Spanish and their low level literacy skills.

Many differences exist between the U.S. and Mexican contexts with regards to language. As I have previously stated, none of my participants had positive experiences in their language classes, whether that be Spanish classes in the U.S. or English classes in Mexico. However, while their knowledge of English was not valued in school, it is highly valued in the world of work. In the U.S.,

Spanish tends valued only so long as it is a *foreign* language. This is obvious in the fact that only 18 % of U.S. university offer classes for heritage language students and a scant 9 % of high schools do (Brecht & Ingold, 1998). The message is clear. Spanish as a foreign language is to be admired, while Spanish as a native or heritage language is to be eradicated.

Since the emphasis is on Spanish as a foreign language, the Spanish as taught in most U.S. secondary schools and universities tends to affirm the value of elite prestige dialects (particularly as they exist in Spain), while denigrating the Spanish spoken by Mexican origin students as “substandard” (Villa, 1996, 2000, 2002; Valdés, 1998). In this way, much Spanish instruction in the U.S. squanders the immense reserves of linguistic capital that heritage Spanish speakers bring to the classroom. My participants do not speak prestige dialects of English. However, when compared to typical English as a foreign language professionals in Nuevo Leon, their English language skills are recognized as superior. The point of comparison is not how they measure up against an idealized, prestige standard of English. Instead, they are valued for the fluency and communicative proficiency they do possess, rather than being categorized as speakers of substandard dialects. It has been my experience that many heritage language students of Spanish possess a higher degree of fluency and communicative ability than the average Spanish as a foreign language learner. Nonetheless, they receive a message from both educational institutions and the society as a whole that what they possess is not valuable. I would argue that the Spanish that heritage

language individuals in the U.S. possess is every bit as valuable, economically and otherwise, as the English spoken by my participants in Mexico.

With this in mind, I believe the first step every Spanish teacher needs to take is to challenge the dominant anti-immigrant discourse in the U.S., a that discourse is directed with particular ferocity at individuals of Mexican origin. In recent years, this anti-immigrant, anti-Mexican demagoguery has sought to exploit divisions within the Mexican origin community by drawing ever sharper lines of demarcation between those who are “legal” and those who are not. Proposition 187 in California is a clear example of this, as is the fact that the term *illegal alien* has gained great popular currency and in essence functions as a code word for *Mexican*. Within the lives of my younger participants, it is obvious that such distinctions have served to pit the documented against the undocumented. As a Spanish teacher, I have seen this manufactured hostility play out in the classroom. Anti-immigrant sentiment is inextricably tied to issues of language. It treats immigrants’ language skills as a problem to be overcome, rather than an asset to be developed. This requires that Spanish teachers be willing to engage their students in open discussion of U.S. society’s denigration of immigrants and immigrants’ language. Certainly, issues such as these are controversial, and may make many teachers uncomfortable. However, it is only through such frank and open discussions that they groundwork for meaningful change can be laid.

Another important step is to integrate real-world applications of Spanish into the curriculum. To be frank, the job opportunities that await bilinguals in, for example, banking or health care, are far greater than those available for someone

who possesses the skills needed to read *Don Quixote* in its original form. Students need to be made aware that their language skills are valuable in the workplace, and they need to have the opportunity to explore the language needs of particular fields of work. Unfortunately, particularly at the university level, the unspoken objective of Spanish language classes is to prepare students to read literary texts. While this is not in itself a bad thing, it becomes problematic when it is emphasized to the exclusion of other potential uses of students' language skills. Simply put, we need to move beyond a elitist, literature based approach to language instruction.

Another important aspect of moving beyond an elitist perspective is to affirm the validity of all dialects. Part of a teacher's job is to stimulate students' interest in further developing their language skills. This cannot be done if students' are made to feel as if their home dialects are somehow "wrong." It is important to remember that every time a teacher corrects a student's "haiga", he or she is not only correcting that student, but in all likelihood is correcting the student's parents, grandparents, and entire speech community. The message is that the student and those like him or her speak an "inferior" dialect. Faced with this negative message, the student's most likely reaction is to abandon the study of Spanish altogether.

Certainly, written Spanish has certain conventions that need to be learned. However, a teacher must be realistic as to what can be addressed within a semester. My participants tell of needing at least a year in what was in effect an immersion setting in order to feel marginally comfortable writing in accordance

with standard conventions. If a teacher meticulously corrects every error a heritage language student makes in their written work, students are likely to either stop writing completely, or else produce simplistic prose that, while it abides by conventional rules, is lacking in vitality and creative, meaningful expression.

Overemphasis on prestige dialects also has ramifications for classroom dynamics. Language functions as a social marker. Regardless of whether a Spanish as a foreign language teacher in the U.S. is familiar with social class differences or rural/urban differences as they manifest themselves in students' language, the students may indeed become aware of each other's class position and geographic origin immediately. While it may not be possible for a Spanish teacher in the U.S. to familiarize him or herself with all the nuances of his or her students' various dialects, he or she should have a broad understanding of these divisions, so as not to exacerbate the problem. By inadvertently validating some of her students' speech while denigrating that of others, the teacher in effect becomes part of the marginalization process.

Respect for the home dialect also includes a respect for Spanglish or code-switching. As I have illustrated in this study, Spanglish is frequently the language of my participants despite their contradictory attitudes toward it because Spanglish fulfills a communicative function which neither English nor Spanish can. As Zentella (1997) who studied the language practices of Puerto Rican origin youth argued, "their code-switching was a way of saying that they belonged to both worlds and should not be forced to give up one for the other" (p.

114). Although a Spanish teacher can do little to change Mexican or U.S. stigmas against Spanglish, he or she can instill pride in students by affirming its validity. For example, this can be done by integrating readings and programs in Spanglish³⁰ and by providing opportunities to speak and write in Spanglish.

Finally, this denigration of the home dialect can also serve to drive a wedge between children and their families which, as my study illustrates, may be the main source of pride and support these students have. As Gándara (1995) posited, family stories which told of past glories and wealth served as cultural capital for working class Chicanos who were succeeding in higher education. Although my participants' hero stories do not hearken back to a life of wealth and sophistication, they are a source of strength. Their stories emphasize the struggles of their parents, who succeeded despite seemingly impossible odds. The Llano Grande Center for Research and Development has put a similar emphasis on local history and family stories of struggle and strength at the center of their youth and community development programs.

As we engage our youth we develop our own epistemology based on family. As we better understand the past, we build our resistance against many of the dominant forces and become more resilient. As we become stronger, we begin to dream and develop a pedagogy of hope that our community and institutions desperately need... (Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, 2003)

³⁰ Resources in Spanglish do exist; the cartoon program *Mucha Lucha*, the plays of Luis Valdez, the performance art and essays of Guillermo Gómez Peña are just a few examples.

This strategy has afforded them considerable success. In the past eight years, fifty-one Mexican origin high school students from one of the poorest counties in the state of Texas have gone on to Ivy League schools.

For many Mexican origin students, Spanish is not an academic subject; it is part of their real world family lives. As is the case for my participants, who see English as important for maintaining family ties, Spanish in the U.S. serves a similar function for Mexican origin students. In other words, for many Mexican origin students, one of the primary goals of developing Spanish proficiency is to better be able to communicate within their own families. Unfortunately, I have rarely seen this objective mentioned in curricular materials. Tapping into local and family resources in the Spanish classroom has great potential as a means of developing the Spanish language skills of Mexican origin youth. Making use of these resources moves Spanish from the textbook into the real world.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS IN GENERAL

While many of the implications I have outlined so far have particular relevance for Spanish teachers, they are by no means confined to them alone. As I pointed out previously, the Mexican origin student population in the U.S. is large and growing, and the high degree of racial segregation characteristic of U.S. public schools means that teachers in all subject areas need to be prepared to meet the needs of Mexican origin students.

The first issue that teachers need to be aware of is the great diversity that exists within the Mexican origin student population. All too often, teachers see

their Mexican origin students as generically “Mexican”, and are oblivious to the differences in class background, geographic origin, and life experiences within this group. At best, they may make some distinction between students who are recent immigrants and those born in the U.S. As my research suggests, these kinds of simplistic dichotomies fail to capture the diversity within the Mexican origin population.

Clearly, none of my participants fit neatly into either category. Elvira, though technically part of the 1.5 generation, appears to have adapted very quickly to school in the U.S. Although she did not begin attending school in the U.S. until her sophomore year in high school, her extended stays in the U.S. had given her valuable cultural capital (i.e. knowledge of English and of U.S. culture) that made her process of adaptation easier. When Laura moved to the U.S. with her young son, school officials took note of his Mexican school transcripts and immediately assigned him to an ESL pullout class. Laura knew he did not need to be in an ESL class and successfully fought the move. Although her son was Spanish dominant, his knowledge of English, learned at home, was far greater than school officials realized. Although exactly what my participants’ children’s U.S. schooling experiences will be like is impossible to predict, I have no doubt that their adaptation to U.S. will be made easier by their transnational experiences. They are not, after all, the children of immigrants, but the children of children of immigrants who have been raised on both sides of the border.

In the same vein, my study makes clear the vast differences that exist between urban and rural Mexico. These differences will manifest themselves in

U.S. classrooms. All my participants believed that children in rural areas of Nuevo Leon were particularly shortchanged with regards to education. This would no doubt be reflected in their performance in U.S. schools. Children who grow up in urban centers such as Monterrey might adapt more quickly and easily to urban schools in the U.S. Furthermore, their experiences of urban life—going to libraries, museums, shopping centers, etc—might reduce their feelings of alienation and enable them to adapt to their new surroundings more easily. Much of the knowledge students from rural areas might bring to the classroom (i.e. knowledge of agriculture) would be irrelevant in the U.S. and leave them in a frightening, unfamiliar world.

Perhaps the most important division within the Mexican origin population is that of class. We may tend to see all, or nearly all, Mexican immigrants in the U.S., and consequently their children, as working class, based on the jobs they hold on the U.S. side of the border. However, what job a Mexican immigrant holds in the U.S. may or may not be a reliable clue to his or her class origins in Mexico. As the case of Don José illustrates, the boundaries of class are not always clearly demarcated. While he performed menial labor in the U.S., and comes from the marginalized rural working class in Mexico, Don José owns several houses, an orange grove, and a small ranch near Lerdo. Similarly, many middle class Mexicans, forced to immigrate due to economic pressures, now hold menial jobs in the U.S. Mexican origin students' original class position in Mexico often has dramatic ramifications for their academic success, regardless of their current class position in the U.S. As a rule, the children of middle class Mexican immigrants

tend to do better academically and adapt more easily to the U.S. context than children of the poor. While my participants' transnational experience has elevated their class position in Mexico, their parents, unlike many middle class Mexican parents, were unable to offer them much help academically in the U.S. It was only through the money they earned working in the U.S. that they were able to offer their children the education they themselves lacked in Mexico. In other words, while they could help little with schooling themselves, they were able to buy the help their children needed in Mexico. In the U.S., by contrast, they were wholly at the mercy of the system. In general, middle class Mexican immigrant parents come to the U.S. with at least some degree of familiarity with schooling and how to navigate educational systems.

Obviously, teachers cannot be expected to be intimately familiar with all the nuances of their students' lives and background. However, they should endeavor to develop a basic understanding of these issues. By doing so, they will be better prepared to assess the special challenges their students face and develop a course of action.

Practical suggestions for teachers in all subject areas abound and follow along the same vein as those presented for Spanish teachers. Social studies teachers can work to dispel common misconceptions regarding immigration and language policy, exploring the issues from a variety of view points and historical periods and thus facilitating the process by which students to formulate informed opinions. Anti-immigrant, anti-Mexican rhetoric is rampant today, much of it based on fabrications and hysterical xenophobia. As my study has illustrated, this

has filtered down into the classroom and is affecting the way students see themselves and each other.

Art and music teachers can integrate “elite” and popular artistic expressions of Mexican origin people from both sides of the border. Business teachers can provide opportunities for students to explore uses of Spanish in the business world. As is the case with the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development, a space can be made to explore family and community history in almost any subject matter. The teacher does not need to be an expert in any of these areas. At the last high school where I taught, I developed a ballet folclórico, based on traditional and contemporary dances, despite the fact that at the time I did not know a single step of any traditional dance. Community members provided instruction in traditional Mexican dances while the students themselves taught contemporary dances. All teachers need to see their Mexican origin students’ families and communities as sources of strength and support for their students. This means tapping into the immense funds of knowledge within family and community networks.

MY FEARS

I fear that some people reading this study will view my participants in a negative light—see them as shrewd, unscrupulous hustlers working the system on both sides of the border for their own advantage. When I presented part of this research at a conference, a conference attendee said as much when she commented that Don José was bilking the system by pretending to still live in

California so that his retirement checks from Social Security would not decrease. I replied that any man who spent most of his life picking the strawberries that she ate deserved every penny from the Social Security system he spent years paying into. Furthermore, he pays all his own medical expenses in Mexico because Medicare coverage does not extend to Mexico.

The fact is that the public policies that affect the lives of people like my participants—immigration laws, economic policies like NAFTA—are made by elites on both sides of the border for their own advantage, and rarely if ever take people like my participants into consideration. Under NAFTA, scores of U.S. companies have relocated to Mexico to take advantage of low labor costs. At the same time, militarization of the border has had dire consequences for those Mexicans seeking to relocate to the U.S. to take advantage of higher wages. Mexican President Vicente Fox issues public service announcements advising Mexicans not to go to the U.S., while at the same time slashing food subsidies and social programs that serve the working poor. In other words, while the U.S. and Mexican governments urge Mexicans to remain in Mexico, they simultaneously advance policies that drive Mexicans across the border.

Mexican elites have always been sheltered from the fluctuating peso because they keep their money in foreign banks. U.S. elites evade taxes by placing their money in overseas accounts. Mexican elites have no problem acquiring student visas or multiple entry tourist visas for the U.S. U.S. tourists flood Mexico every year—no visa required. Yet, Carely, a U.S. citizen by birth

and whose mother still lives in the U.S., has a hard time getting a U.S. passport despite all the official documentation she possesses.

Individuals like my participants should not be demonized for not following rules made by elites who rarely follow them. Transnationalism is at once a means of adaptation to realities my participants are forced to live with, and also acts of resistance against forces over which they have little control. There is a lot of talk these days from “above” on both sides of the border about free trade and globalization. Perhaps, it is best to view the adaptation and resistance strategies of my participants as globalization and free trade from “below.”

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Vita

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