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Cross–Cultural Considerations in the Education of Young Immigrant Learners

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Crossing Borders toward Young Transnational Lives

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ABSTRACT

Young immigrant youth often live their lives across borders, either by physically crossing them for return visits and/or by metaphorically crossing them through social media and cultural identification. The authors argue these students are better understood as transnational, shifting the focus for educators away from imagining their immigrant students on a straight, one-way path to assimilation in the U.S. to understanding these youths' abilities to cross borders. Specifically, they call for a redesignation of English Language Learners (ELLs) as Transnational English Learners (TEs). Highlighting examples of educators' successful border-crossing work, the authors call for educators to cross borders as well in their curriculum and relationships with transnational youth.

INTRODUCTION

In a non-ESL, non-bilingual education 2nd grade urban classroom in Texas, I asked the students to raise their hands if they had been to Mexico in the previous year. Well over half of the students said they had.

“Wow, you’re world travelers,” I said to them. Many of their faces brightened at the notion which positioned them positively, as agents of movement.

Their otherwise kind, 3rd generation Mexican American teacher laughed dismissively and moved on with her lesson where I was a visitor. My heart sank (GSK).

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In this chapter, we argue that immigrant youth are not only immigrants on a one-way journey toward the U.S., but that they are transnational (Sánchez & Kasun, 2012). Transnational youth may physically cross borders to sending countries, but they may also figuratively cross them through communication with families and communities as well as through the consumption of media, from social media to music to film (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc, 1994; Wolf, 2002). They are the children of families whose lives straddle borders in real time and in ways that connect past, present, and future through families' hopes, fears, and dreams (Appadurai, 2008). Herein, we outline a call for educators to reframe immigrant youth as transnational. We then offer suggestions for curriculum shifts, which acknowledge and draw from young immigrants' transnationalism in an age of globalization. We draw from ethnographic examples in our own research with youth and our own lived, transnational experiences spanning national borders. Finally, we make recommendations for educators to cross epistemological borders (Mignolo, 2000) in order to work more effectively in solidarity with their transnational young students and families.

Disrupting Western Discourses of Childhood: Opening Possibilities

Before explaining what we mean by reconsidering immigrant youth as transnationals, we first examine the idea of what it means to be a child. By disrupting often taken-for-granted discourses about childhood, this allows us to open a space toward reconceptualizing the sense of immigrants as well. Our ideas of childhood have varied and changed throughout history (Aries, 1962). In fact, scholars have argued how the very term has meant different things at different times historically, culturally and politically (James, Jenks & Prout; 1998; Zelizer, 1985). Modern conceptions of childhood reflect the ideas of our times through scientific research, culture, class, religion, law, and

medicine, among others (Burman 1998; Cannella, 1997). For example, we apply the same beliefs about scientific research in the natural world as we do to human change and then we generalize the "findings" to be applicable to all children. Those who do not fit the model of human change are seen as less advanced. This belief is carried over to the schools (Kessler & Swadener, 1992). That is, the sanctioned way of relating to and seeing children via learning, teaching, assessing and caring for them has been constructed from one hegemonic view, giving us a unidimensional, monocultural and linear view of childhood. Yet as Gutiérrez (2008) has discussed, children "develop" in complex polycultural/lingual and multidimensional spaces and are impacted by, as well impact their ecological communities making human change a more dynamic bidirectional process. For instance, in her research in Alaska, Delpit (2006) offers a concrete example of how views of children differ drastically and how we then construct our relationship with them based on our beliefs. Non-Natives, Delpit recounts:

tend to think of children as unformed future adults. We hear about the birth of a child and ask questions like, 'What did she have?', 'How much did it weigh?', Does it have any hair?' The Athabaskan Indians hear of a birth and ask, 'Who came?' From the beginning there is a respect for the newborn as a full person (p. 100).

Our ideas, along with our narrow scientific research, have contributed inevitably to a false notion that a universal (white male) child exists (Cannella, 1997). Within this view, children are seen as incapable of understanding their world, acting upon it or transforming it, especially of those experiences or their worlds deviate from the white middle class standard. The experiences, perspectives outside this hegemony are too often deemed deficient and in constant need of (white) intervention.

Consequently, the multiplicity and diversity of *being* of families and children has been a challenge to embrace in schools due to Euro-American concepts of child development that have established acceptable perspectives and practices with young children in the schools and in the home (Cannella, 1997)--what a child can and cannot do. According to many early childhood education scholars, we must recognize that developmentally appropriate practices (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) can no longer be the only and best approach to working with and educating diverse young children (Delpit, 2006; Kessler, 1991; Silin, 1987; Soto, 2000; Walkerdine, 1984). Developmentally appropriate dogma may limit us from recognizing the complex and multidimensional, polycultural lives that students live everyday, as they cross cultural, linguistic and epistemological borders. We hold them back, thinking young children cannot engage with or understand the world they inhabit. This realization is timely and necessary in our ever increasingly transnational and global context found within the United States.

REFRAMING YOUNG IMMIGRANTS AS TRANSNATIONALS

As geographical borders, identities and nationalism become more tenuous, ambiguous and fluid, our research and pedagogies with border crossers, transnationals and global citizens must move beyond additive models of multicultural education. We must recognize how transnational populations and mass migrations around the globe not only reflect economic realities but also represent new possibilities to learn to be flexible citizens (Ong, 1999). The lessons can help us reconceptualize our understanding of working with/for diverse populations of children. The new faces of the U.S. are not only faces, but are also bodies, epistemologies, ontologies, that can complement, enrich and provide new tools, pedagogies and human relations.

As multicultural and second language educators, we are concerned with the way in which schools label students who do not fit under the terms dominant and mainstream, in particular those students who come with languages other than English. Consequently, we argue that any "immigrant" to the U.S. is actually also a transnational, and we call for a shift in the ways we frame immigrant students to highlight the complexity of who they and their families are, as well as their ways of knowing. This change in labeling could be quite powerful, as it would force those who work with transnationals to reckon with the transnational parts of these students' and families' identities; the label also forces a shift in expectations to understanding the additional components of these families' lives, components that more monocultural people do not have. This label would help shift the discourse away from the increasingly derogatory usage of the word "immigrant," particularly in the climate of anti-immigrant legislation that has been proposed throughout much of the U.S. Its regular usage would, in turn, normalize transnational participation, and transnational students would have a much easier time in school expressing who they are and their ways of knowing. In turn, each family's transnational participation would be valued by school members and the family members themselves. In the following section, we demonstrate three examples of transnationalism and its disarticulation with schooling experiences, including the authors' lived experiences as part of this testimony.

Transnational Youth: Case Examples

Cinthy's Testimonio of Transnationality

Crossing borders has been my experience since the young age of four when my family moved to Honduras from our native country of Nicaragua during the civil war. By the time I was eight years old, I had lived in three countries--Nicaragua, Honduras and the United States--Brownsville, Texas to be

exact. When I think of these experiences now, I think of the wealth of knowledge I brought to the States at such a young age. Before my arrival to the U.S, I had knowledge and experiences with terms like of civil wars, revolutions, military violence, government instability, immigration, nationality, visas, passports, discrimination, dictatorship, resistance, linguistic variety in the Spanish language, and many other concepts. I think of this because to schools I was just a bilingual student at best and deficient other at worst. None of these experiences were valued or even acknowledged. This wealth of knowledge went into hiding along with my Nicaraguan heritage, my native language, and ultimately my identity. It would be years before I would revisit my experience and think and theorize them as knowledge, and even powerful.

But not all was lost. There is strong impulse for the self not to forget its journey and make connections and resurface when necessary. As part of my participation in a research team examining bilingual immigrant students in North Carolina pre-k classroom, I (re)remembered and connected to my transnational experiences and knowledge. I could “see” that these young transnational students were not deficient in anyway. The “problems” were the unrecognized and undervalued ways of being and *conocimientos*, or knowledges, they brought to schools. Their silences, their languages, their body language, their knowledge was just not seen in another way but deficient and in great need of intervention. My seeing myself in them, my transnational *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2002) and sensitivity resurfaced. And this reflection encouraged me to rethink my research with my colleagues and use a transnational feminist lens to investigate the context in which these young transnational found themselves in the classroom (Saavedra, Chakravarti, & Lower, 2009).

Currently, the concept of transnationality resurfaced once again and this time on a different level for me--as an imposed transnationality. I'm in a committed relationship with a Mexican national who after living in the U.S for fifteen plus years

has been deported. My forced travels back and forth remind me of the millions of children who travel not only national borders, but cultural, linguistic and racial/ethnic borders everyday as they go to and from schools in the U.S--here only one side of those borders are valued. Transnationality is not neat, in vogue or exotic. It is complex and messy. It can be traumatic and also offer spaces of hope, connectivity. My transnational cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) reminds me of my deepest connections to my Nicaraguan, Tex-Mex, and U.S Latina heritage and allows me ways to have an appreciation for and value the *difference* I experience.

Taylor Delgado, First Grader,
Washington, D.C. Area

By the time Taylor Delgado was in first grade, he had traveled to and from Mexico four times since his birth in the Washington, D.C. area with his parents. Altogether, he had spent at over seven months of his life during his visits to Mexico. His eyes had taken in the shifts of scenery from green rolling hills to dryer terrains of Texas flatlands to the transition of the Sierra Madre mountains closer to their destination in western Mexico. He transitioned from the Mexican style food his mom carefully prepared each day and U.S.-oriented fare served in his elementary school to his extended family's meetings for *carne asada* or grilled Mexican style meats among so many other Mexican meals. The U.S.-inspired senses of the importance of the individual and the nuclear family were replaced by *la convivencia* of being among his extended family and community during prolonged visits to Mexico, where co-mothering and co-parenting were shared duties of cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and neighbors, reflecting the ancestral ways of caring for and maintaining families. The return visits were part of the ways the family held on to and cultivated their diasporic community knowledge (Urrieta & Martínez, 2011). Taylor accompanied his older

siblings during visits to Mexico to buy their daily tortillas from neighborhood small tortilla factories as well as fresh fruits and vegetables at the nearby market where they spoke with the children and adults on the other side of the counter who sold them food. Conversations were casual and familiar, unlike more anonymous transactions in their Washington, D.C. area big box grocery stores where they carefully budgeted their income by purchasing their food from a rotating roster of anonymous cashiers with little investment in the big box where they were employed, let alone the masses of consumers.

When Taylor's mother, Edith, was asked about what his teachers knew about his return visits to Mexico and his transnational participation on the phone with relatives, as well as his television viewing habits of Spanish programming, she replied that she thought they knew very little. Instead, her son, sensitive and inquisitive, was framed as a problem by his teacher because he was frequently picked on. Edith took on the burden of volunteering on a nearly daily basis for her son's teacher to try to help him avoid the bullying he had been subjected to. Was she ever asked about her transnational knowledge? No, she said, never.

Sue's Experience as Adult Transnational

I am an unlikely transnational. I claim the label from a very different positioning than the youth who born in different countries or whose parents were. I was raised in West Virginia for the first eighteen years of my life, and as far as I know, I'm the only person from my high school's graduating class who has ever lived in a different country. We were not formally or informally educated where I grew up to consider living anywhere other than the U.S., but I found myself drawn to living in Mexico nonetheless.

It turns out my circumstances are no longer unique. Fully 40% of 18-24 year olds are considering the option of living outside the U.S. for at

least two years and for purposes other than study, military or government work (Adams, 2011). I point to this statistic to help educators understand the increasingly globalized context in which we live, one that makes the contemporary imagination of people nearly everywhere consider their options beyond the national borders in which they were born (Appadurai, 2008). While this chapter is geared toward understanding the circumstances of young people whose families aren't from the U.S., it is worth noting that transnationalism may be an experience that all students may experience. It may also be hidden among people who have returned to the U.S. but who may be considering returning to other countries outside the U.S.

Regarding my own transnationalism, I lacked language to describe my experiences and feelings upon returning to the U.S. after my last long-term period of living in Mexico for three years. I had worked in Mexican and U.S. schools, researched, and completed a Master's degree while living there, yet these experiences were almost entirely invisible to everyone else I encountered. I experienced this feeling of isolation while living in one of the most diverse and transient areas of the U.S.--the Washington, D.C. area. It was painful and lonely, my transnationalism was hidden, much like the transnationalism described in Sánchez's careful examination of transnational Latinas with whom she has researched for years (2004, 2009). I continually found myself comparing my life experiences in Mexico to the new ones I was having in the U.S. If I wanted to celebrate a birthday with a friend, for instance, why did it take three weeks of planning to share a meal together, when my experience in Mexico had been that we could almost spontaneously connect that very day in the celebrated's honor? I struggled through reframing and reunderstanding ordinary life circumstances.

In the next section, we argue for new language to describe transnationals. I foreground my experience in this realm. While I lived in Mexico, I held varying degrees of documents to maintain my legal presence, either formally as a tourist or

as a worker. These documents were “migratory” forms, though I was never once referred to as an immigrant, let alone questioned as a possible “illegal” (though my *legal* status at times may have been questionable). I was, and am, very much, transnational, eager to understand the world from multiple positionings while immersing myself in the cultures and language of Mexico, in which I ultimately became fluent. In the meantime, I struggle to maintain and hold this transnationalism. I speak Spanish exclusively with my daughter, Maya, and I work collaboratively with programs that take me into Mexico with her regularly. This transnationalism feels threatened as I struggle to make the physical realities of our travel there reality and as I struggle to have others in the U.S. understand my senses of seeing the world through multiple lenses.

A CALL TO NAME TRANSNATIONALS

Currently, schools recognize the federally sanctioned label of “Limited English Proficient,” or LEP, to describe students, usually starting the identification process by administering families a home language survey. That same survey could be used to ask if families have transnational participation—with questions about whether families make return visits to visit families in other countries, whether they engage family members living in other countries, and whether they identify with those other countries. We argue that any “immigrant” to the U.S. is actually also a transnational, and we call for a shift in the ways we frame immigrant students to highlight the complexity of who they and their families are, as well as their ways of knowing. Much like identifying data that are coded about each individual student electronically today, this information could be made available to educators. Sharing this knowledge with educators would help them understand that transnational students may not only be first- and

second-generation (or later) immigrants, but that their lives may be far more complex than the idea that families come to the U.S. on a one-way journey to the U.S., never to look back, an idea that seems pervasive in U.S. education.

This change in labeling could be quite powerful, as it would force those who work with transnationals to reckon with the transnational parts of these students’ and families’ identities; the label would also force a shift in expectations to understanding the additional components of these families’ lives, components that more monocultural people do not have. This label would help shift the discourse away from the increasingly derogatory usage of the word “immigrant,” particularly in the climate of anti-immigrant legislation currently being proposed throughout much of the U.S. Its regular usage would, in turn, normalize transnational participation, and transnational students would have a much easier time in school expressing who they are and their ways of knowing. In turn, this could also help alleviate the gap between parents’ adaptation and their children’s adaptation to the U.S. in the cases of newly arriving families, as each family’s members transnational participation would be valued by school members and the family members themselves.

On a federal and state policy level, it’s time for a shift in language from the federal government terminology of LEP (U.S. Department of Education, 2012) to including the potential transnationalism of students. We are not saying that all transnational students necessarily would qualify as “LEP”; however, many transnationals do have the need for English language instruction. While the field of English instruction to speakers of other languages has shifted toward the use of “ESOL students” or “ELLs,”—English for Speakers of Other Languages students and English language learners, respectively—this focuses solely on linguistic ability. These labels still portray the students as “deficient” by showing what students are missing—English. Furthermore, this focus on English linguistic ability vivisects transnational

students from other important aspects of their lives, they become empty bodies, the *deslenguados*, those without tongues (Anzaldúa, 1987; Demas & Saavedra, 2004). These labels are potentially dangerous as they mask the complexity and dynamic of living between and across borders, simplifying and reducing the lives of transnational students linguistic skills.

Our research has demonstrated the multitude of ways these transnational families have knowings which manifest skills and experiences that are unique and worthy of being understood and built upon. An appropriate shift would be “Transnational English Learners,” or TELs, for, as we indicated previously, even the potential to engage transnationally would allow for students to be called “transnational.” It would help the issue about teaching English to heritage English speakers from other countries whose academic language does not position them toward academic success. We heretofore refer to these students as TELs.

TRANSNATIONAL CURRICULUM AND YOUNG TRANSNATIONALS’ LIVES

For the purposes of curriculum development, the experience of transnationalism needs to be added and understood by all students, especially in an era that is increasingly globalized (Suárez-Orozco & Sattin, 2007). While many propose the need for the curriculum to speak toward globalization (such as the International Baccalaureate curriculum), only a few have argued for the recognition of transnationalism as part of that globalization (Saavedra & Camicia, 2010).

The study of transnationalism reframes simpler discourses of one-way immigration and shows the more complex ways transnationals navigate multiple nations and cultures. We applaud the work many researchers have done in documenting the importance of showing how transnational families have long-rooted histories of movement

and survival across borders. For instance, Pacheco (2009) highlights the generative work of an East L.A. California classroom teacher and the creation of agentic classroom writing regarding the historical and political knowledges of bilingual education students, especially as it related to the fiery anti-immigrant rhetoric during 2006 and the massive counter-responses by those who were more thoughtful about the contributions and needs of those cast as “immigrants” (2009). She articulates a different vision regarding immigration by using parentheses throughout her piece to problematize the issue as (im)migration. Similarly, authors such as Freeman, Freeman & Mercuri (2002) and Cummins, Bismilla, Cohen, Giampapa, and Leoni (2005) highlight the importance of including transnational students’ lives as part of historic processes of movements spanning borders, though in these cases framing the situations as cases of straight *migration*. We beg for the use of a new language, the term of TELs, to demonstrate the actual back-and-forth movement of students and families--whether it be literal or figurative--arguing that framing these activities as immigration alone masks the many other factors and skills at play.

These are skills that will help all students better navigate an increasingly globalized world. As the U.S. continues to move toward the implementation of curriculum standards, then transnationalism should be embedded into the standards. Transnationalism can easily be embedded into language arts, social studies, math, and science curricular areas, and ideally it would be studied in a cross-disciplinary fashion. For instance, in a unit explicitly about transnationalism we propose that the following Common Core standards could be met in order to introduce the concept to young children. Teachers can begin with both fiction and non-fiction accounts of transnational lives and border crossing. Throughout the rest of the content areas, students can study transnationalism in social studies by reading local/inter/national newspapers, and social science reports. In math,

students can study demographics of data of the U.S and create their own demographic charts in from data gathered in their classroom. In science, students can investigate the ways transnational migrations impact the environment or are impacted by the environmental forces as well as the effect on global health. Important is to keep allowing students' stories or testimonios to be part of the knowledge shared and learned throughout the unit where transnational students can take lead roles in the curriculum (Saavedra, 2011). Following we offer some curricular objective examples paired with both Common Core standards and possible resources for each of four content areas (Table 1).

EDUCATORS CROSSING BORDERS

Before proceeding, we caution that discussing the crossing of countries' borders is not to be taken lightly or romanticized. For instance, people die trying to cross the Mexican-U.S. border before they even make it to the border; the perils are haunting and many (Anzaldúa, 1999; Spener, 2009; Urrieta, 2003). That said, we believe the courage of transnational families to cross borders is a model from which educators can learn. If our students' families have the courage to make such risks for their children's futures, can educators not take a much smaller-scale effort to cross much

Table 1. Curriculum connections to transnationalism across subject areas

Curricular Area	Objectives	Suggested Texts
<p><i>Language arts</i> Common Core Standard: Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.</p>	<p>--Compare the ways transnational people live in the world with people who have lived in one country for generations --Gather approaches to living in the world transnationally and then apply to the student's own life experiences</p>	<p>Nonfiction texts, such as news reports, autobiographical and biographical essays <i>Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del Otro Lado</i> (1997) by Gloria Anzaldúa; <i>Recuerdo mis raíces y vivo mis tradiciones: Remembering my Roots and Living my Traditions</i> (2003) by TransNational Latinas</p>
<p><i>Social studies</i> Common Core Standard: Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).</p>	<p>--Compare the engagement of transnational people today with previous waves of migratory movements --Determine what causes the movements of people transnationally and the impacts, both local and global --Understand how and why people identify with more than one nation while critically evaluating one's own national affiliations</p>	<p>Local, national, and international newspapers (adapted by teacher as necessary)</p>
<p><i>Math</i> Common Core Standard: Use addition and subtraction within 100 to solve one- and two-step word problems involving situations of adding to, taking from, putting together, taking apart, and comparing, with unknowns in all positions, e.g., by using drawings and equations with a symbol for the unknown number to represent the problem</p>	<p>--In units on addition, subtraction, multiplication and division; fractions and probability, compare numbers of the movements of remittances and people across countries</p>	<p>Demographic data from the U.S. Census and the United Nations</p>
<p><i>Science</i> Common Core Standard: Compare and contrast the information gained from experiments, simulations, video, or multimedia sources with that gained from reading a text on the same topic.</p>	<p>--Understand the impacts of the transnational movements of people across borders on the environment and on global health</p>	<p>World Health Organization data; United Nations data; newspapers and magazines (adapted by teacher as necessary)</p>

less threatening borders in the collective effort to educate children? We do not, however, consider our call for border crossing a pedagogy (Giroux, 1992), instead we ask educators to attempt to embrace an(other) way of knowing—but they have to do the border crossing to get there. Many educators claim to be lifelong learners. If teachers can be lifelong learners, why not lifelong border crossers? The crossing they will have to do is one that will require a lifetime of movements that are liminal and recursive, much like “border thinking” of people who have lived in and survived colonialism despite its attempts to erase their identities (Mignolo, 2000). It is a lifetime process.

Some educators have done literal border crossings to mirror the transnational movements of their own students by studying and learning from the sending communities their students’ families were from (Browning-Aiken, 2005; Hatt, 2013; Olmedo, 2004). Olmedo (2004) led a group of in-service teachers on a Fulbright program to a historic sending region of western Mexico, the state of Michoacán, to develop funds of knowledge (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005) oriented multicultural curricular units for use in their Chicago, predominantly Mexican-origin classrooms for six weeks. They followed up the next semester in a course in which she was their instructor as they developed their units of study. Even though most were Latina/o and all were fluent in Spanish, they agreed that even they had much to learn from the experience by examining in greater depth the contexts from which their students’ families had come and frequently returned in their transnational participation. Families from Mexico were positioned as sources of knowledge from which the teachers drew when they returned to the U.S. to instruct their students. As a result, some teachers were able to build units surrounding transnational movement and successfully engaged many nuances surrounding these issues with children as young as second grade. Teachers agreed the experience of observing the contexts from which many of their students came expanded

their understandings and helped them continue to cross borders even upon return. Olmedo cites one teacher, Ann, as saying:

What was successful is the experience itself . . . going there and learning, talking with the people . . . being able to live with the families, we were able to have a lot of interaction with them. . . . I’m Hispanic but not Mexican, and it’s very different from what’s taught here . . . so just getting to know them is like getting to know a different ethnic group than even the Mexicans here. . . . Within Mexico there’s such a diverse group of languages, people and everything else that you can’t really lump them into one (p. 259-260).

Beth Hatt experienced similar successes in doing border crossing work with educators in a Fulbright-Hays program which she led to Cuernavaca, Mexico, in the summer of 2012, in partnership with CETLALIC, a social justice language and cultural exchange school (personal communication, February 27, 2013). Hatt said it was very helpful for all participants in their efforts to internationalize their curricula and better understand their students. One white in-service teacher who had never traveled abroad before his trip to Mexico said, “Now I understand my quiet Latino students in the back of the classroom.” Because of his struggles to learn the language, and all the insecurities he felt because of those struggles, he better understood his students’ experiences in the U.S. Hatt also exposes some phenomena which may continue to present challenges in the border crossing work of educators--what happens when people who are several generations removed from a country return. She said the Mexican American students were held by Mexicans to higher standards of expectations about their behavior simply because they were Mexican American; she said this standard was difficult to achieve and also hard for her students to accept after having been generations removed from Mexico (Hatt, personal communication, February 27, 2013).

Their sometimes painful experiences point to the need to encourage transnationalism rather than project expectations of one-way assimilation on transnational students.

Browning-Aiken (2005) also discovers a diversity of cultures by researching with a Tucson-based family and their extended community in Cananea, Mexico. She consulted with teachers in the school district to learn what data she could gather that would be helpful for teachers' lesson plan development. As a result, she collected family stories and histories to help teachers consider how to work with families from this part of Mexico, particularly as it related to their long histories of working in copper mines spanning both sides of the border. She recommends that teachers pursue a depth of understanding of their transnational students, and she explains that the payoffs are rich and nuanced:

Teachers can acquire an overall sense of the cultural and historical continuity existing within a population that has flowed back and forth across the border for economic and family reasons for centuries. The border in this sense is not just an arbitrary geographical line or fence for keeping people in or out, but it is a bridge for people trying to maintain their ties in two countries and to have the best of both worlds (p. 179).

Browning-Aiken shows that the border is not simply a policing device but one that has linked communities for centuries, despite its potential for ruptures and woundings. Might not teachers themselves learn from and enjoy the "best of both worlds" if they were to attempt to do border crossing, as well?

We urge educators to attempt to meet on the "same side of the river" (Anzaldúa, 1999; Elenes, 2001) as their transnational students instead of reproducing an educational system, which by its inequalitarian nature keeps transnational students on the other side. We look to Elenes (2001) for wisdom regarding how separate river banks are

constituted and how we can negotiate the dualistic thinking which keeps us on opposite sides of the river:

Most of us have a tendency to fall back into the "comfortable" territory where the world gets divided into an "us" vs. "them": teacher/student, male/female, white/nonwhite. Sometimes we do this because we do not have, or cannot find, another language by which to express our feelings and thoughts; other times because we work on preconceived perceptions of who we are according to social position... If we are to move to the "same side of river" we must constantly negotiate the tensions that emerge in the classroom as a result of the multiplicity of identities and ideologies present (p. 693).

It is only through crossing over--over and over again--that educators will be able to join with their transnational students toward working collectively with them toward their education. This will require a host of discomforts for educators. Disrupting the comforts of educators also means disrupting the negative discourses surrounding transnational students. This means teachers and administrators must *name* their low expectations and interrogate *why* they hold low expectations of TELs and immigrant families. It's time to understand *who* the people are that educators hope to teach and how they can work with all the families in their schools (Delpit, 2006; Olivos, 2006). We offer a list of questions educators can ask themselves as a sort of gut-check to consider if they should engage this liminal sense where they cross between what they think they know about transnational students towards a more complete and accurate understanding:

1. Do I blame students and their parents for students' low academic performance?
2. Do I try to avoid working with certain populations of students so I can work with "better" students?

3. Does hearing students speak another language make me feel uncomfortable?
4. Do cultural markers with which I am not familiar (such as students' forms of dress or style of communication) make me uncomfortable; do I think that they should learn to dress or talk "normally"?
5. Of the historically marginalized students I teach, are they performing academically below their white counterparts?

If an educator says yes to any of those questions, then she should investigate disrupting her own comfort toward the end of being better able to engage her students. Having the courage to attempt and do this self-reflection and shift toward expanding understandings requires stepping into the liminal sense of not-knowing.

For the educator, this work carries a possibility for transformation. The educator can shift from deficit thinking about transnational students and their families (Delpit, 2006; Valencia, 1997) toward one that begins to embrace their students' sophisticated ways of knowing. For instance, a very uncomfortable possibility is that educators will come to learn that they do not *know* in the same ways many of their students *know*, in this very act, they may come to make evident their own epistemology. This potentially highly discomforting finding is one that schools and districts need to offer support in; that support may likely come from the communities they have previously so unsuccessfully engaged. Positioned toward generative dialog (Freire, 1970), districts and schools can invite parents and family members to help educate staff members about who they are, their expectations and hopes for their children, and how they educate their children at home (Olivos, 2006). Such understandings would help begin to bridge the divide between schools and transnational families.

As we bring this chapter to a close, we offer the sentiments of one teacher who has and continues to venture across borders of knowing in order to

connect with her students. Emmie works with a group of transnational students at a high school. Working with two university professors, she has developed a course that centers the everyday lives of her students and takes them on a journey of self-awareness, self-empowerment and hope. How does she even begin such a journey, she comments:

It has been a working progress to cross the border of knowing in order to connect with the students! It definitely takes time! Over and over I have used personal examples to show the students that I have to break out of my shell and share what voice is inside of me in order for them to truly understand me. We had many lessons on human relations and that humans relate to one another on the most basic fundamental level spurred by empathy for one another. A story is just a story until there is human emotion behind it. (personal communication, March 25, 2013)

For her crossing the borders of knowing means more than just getting to know them, she believes:

Through sharing my own personal stories, allowing students to be themselves through a safe environment, creating relationships of trust beyond those made with my other classes, providing extra time to share at their own pace and gain confidence, and just simply supporting who they are as a person (loving them) has resulted in students who are willing to risk for me. Crossing the border to the students' side of knowing and understanding their world more than just being a teacher is the only way I can foresee the defensive wall coming down (personal communication, March 25, 2013).

CONCLUSION

It is time educators recognize their immigrant students' transnational lives and reframe these students as transnational. In an increasingly globalized world, as echoed from the perspectives of the authors and of individuals with whom we have researched, we claim that need to focus on abilities

of youth to create connections and cross borders instead of negating these skills. We also believe it is time to formally embed this understanding by calling immigrant youth what they are—transnationals. Hence, we have devised a new term to be used in the official ways we designate English language learners as TELS, or transnational English learners. We also recommend educators shift their curriculum to reflect the increasingly transnational lives of youth they teach.

We also encourage educational researchers to begin to examine the contexts, lives and experiences of TELS in order to contribute to this reconceptualization of ESL, ELLs as TELS. This will provide glimpses of the rich knowledges that already exist across our geographical and metaphorical borders as our students engage and navigate multiple border crossings everyday. These new insights can provide important lessons for those who work with transnational families and children as ways to bridge home and school. Moreover, investigating the experiences of transnational children in schools can help address the discrimination that transpires as a result of not recognizing the bicultural and ethnic identity development of young transnational children.

In conclusion, the borders we suggest that educators transgress help maintain the Whiteman hegemony of formal schooling. Uprooting that order would threaten the order of the society in which we live. Real penetration means understanding what lies on the other sides of borders (Anzaldúa, 2002). Are educators ready to understand the points of view, the ways of knowing, of the young people they teach? If they understand the ways of knowing of their students, their own ways of knowing will become affected as well. That knowing will lend itself to the educators' sense of obligation to having some kind of responsibility for the conditions which have forced the movement of transnationals over the border to the U.S.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Border Crossing: The ability to cross physical and metaphoric borders toward recasting one’s understanding and bridging differences among people.

Childhood: The stage in human development/change attributed to younger human beings and is influenced and more specifically defined by the epistemological and ontological ideas of particular cultures and societies.

Conocimiento: The ways a person knows the world through multiple senses and then is imbued with knowing toward action.

Epistemology: Theory of how one knows the world; there are multiple epistemologies, not just one.

Crossing Borders toward Young Transnational Lives

Transnational Curriculum: Material created and taught which accurately reflects the lived experiences of TELs. It encourages all students to recognize their roles in an increasingly globalized world.

Transnational English Learners (TELs): Term to reframe immigrant youth who are learning English which recognizes their transnationalism.

Transnationalism: The physical and metaphoric movement of people across borders, including, but not limited to: visits across countries, social media, consumption of different countries and nations' media, relationships across borders.