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Transborder Literacies of (In)Visibility

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Abstract:

Drawing from an ethnography with mixed-status families residing in Mexico, we examine what we term *transborder literacies of (in)visibility*, diasporic people's innovative interactions around texts that prepare them to move across incompatible mononational institutions divided by borders. Through close attention to the literacy practices families engaged in as they applied for their children's U.S. passports from Mexico, we demonstrate how these literacies were not just about expanding authentic ways of reading and writing to include both U.S. and Mexican ways, but instead required unique transborder literacies across mutually unintelligible, racializing mononational systems so that children could (re)access their rights on both sides of the border. We argue that recognizing families' complex transborder literacy practices of (in)visibility could offer a novel anti-oppressive lens to transform how educators make sense of the complexity of immigrant families' literacies, movements, and educational supports across borders and national schooling systems.

Keywords: Border Literacies; Transborder; Critical Literacy; Immigration; Latinx

> On a Saturday morning in February in central Mexico, two months after Trump took office in the U.S., I sat in a chicle green 5th grade classroom talking with a father who had previously lived in the U.S. without official documentation. During the first pair and share activity he asked if it was true—could the new administration decide to take away the U.S. citizenship of his U.S.-born son? He wondered if there were specific papers he should acquire now, such as renewing his son's U.S. passport, to secure his son's legal access to one of the countries he calls home (Field Notes (FN) 2/25/17).

This field note comes from a workshop with families of the Latinx diaspora, whose lives, emotional ties, and bodies multidirectionally cross geopolitical borders (Dyrness & Sepúlveda, 2020). It reflects the inextricability of literacy practices from families' movements across borders, national systems, and their engagement in the trámites, or processes, required to access and protect their children's rights. These literacy practices are not static, they require strategic enactments of (in)visibility—dexterous decisions to document their lives as existing and legible (visible) or imperceptible (invisible) to institutional authorities across national contexts.

In this article we examine what we term *transborder literacies of (in)visibility*, diasporic people's innovative interactions around texts that prepare them to move across incompatible mononational institutions divided by borders. We contribute to the field of literacy education research by demonstrating how mobile families' movements across borders require complex literacy events around papeles that draw upon their subaltern experiences as they seek to (re)access children's rights across racializing national systems. Drawing from an ethnographic study with mixed-status families[1] residing in Mexico, we illustrate how these literacies were not just about expanding authentic ways of reading and writing to include both U.S. and Mexican ways. Instead, these uniquely transborder literacies centered on successfully completing trámites through mutually unintelligible mononational systems. We highlight how parents, who developed a wide range of transborder knowledges through living undocumented in the U.S., had to dexterously maneuver between literacies of invisibility—in which they sought to evade inspection and surveillance in the U.S.—with newer literacies of hypervisibility to document and prove their U.S.-born children's claims to movement and belonging within and across borders. They engaged in these literacies on behalf of and alongside their children, offering important

lessons on brokering across institutions, imagining multidirectional futures into realities, and interrogating disjunctures of inequities.

Through an examination of mixed-status families' literacy practices around U.S. passport applications while in Mexico, we argue that recognizing families' complex transborder literacy practices of (in)visibility could offer a novel anti-oppressive lens to transform how educators make sense of the complexity of immigrant families' literacies, movements, and educational supports across borders and national schooling systems. To understand these literacies, we explore the following research questions: 1) How do members of transborder families engage in literacy practices to access movement within and across institutions and borders? And 2) How does differential access to U.S. or Mexican papers shape these literacy practices? This matters for literacy instruction because it offers a unique a window into mobile families' ways of doing literacy across borders that are rarely present in schools. In what follows we describe the theoretical framing we draw upon to examine transborder literacies of (in)visibility and how it contributes to our understandings of critical literacies. Next, we present our findings to highlight the practices of institutional brokering, documenting against undocumentedness, and dexterity across (in)visibilities before discussing the implications for educational policy and literacy instruction.

Transborder Literacies Framework

Broadly we view literacy through a critical, sociocultural approach that moves away from a focus on discrete autonomous skills (e.g., decoding), and instead understands interactions around texts as social actions imbued with power relations (Freire & Macedo, 2005; Street, 1984). Our approach begins with the premise that what counts as literacy and who counts as doing literacy in the right kinds of ways is never neutral, and that meanings ascribed to these

practices shifts across contexts (Street, 1984). We focus on a form of border literacy practices, analyzing complex critical literacy events, or interactions around texts (Heath, 1983; Rusoja, 2022) such as passport applications, birth certificates, and schooling records—the literal papeles for institutional border crossing.

Policies and practices in schools and at borders have largely been built, naturalized, justified, and reproduced by White European colonizing legacies that exclude racialized people's ways of knowing and limit freedom of movement across imposed borders (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016; Mignolo, 2000). Hierarchical categories—such as whose documents provide relatively unrestricted global movement or what counts as good reading and writing in schools—unfold along national, racial, and class-based lines that are rarely questioned. Border literacies require deterritorialization and offer a window into literacies within and across colonial legacies that reveal the limitations imposed by boundaries and hierarchies created by and for colonial powers (Degollado et al., 2021). As such, transborder families' experiences crossing incompatible, racializing institutions could offer decolonial ways of doing literacy born out of their subaltern experiences of multidirectional multiplicity (Mignolo, 2000).

To date, most border literacy research has unfolded within the physical borderlands of Mexico and the U.S., often focusing on the practices of transfronterixs, those who frequently cross the geopolitical border dividing their lives (De la Piedra et al., 2018; Degollado et al., 2021; Nuñez & Urietta, 2021). These include literacies of surveillance that draw upon their full linguistic and embodied literacy repertoires as racialized subjects to successfully cross the border (Nuñez & Urietta, 2021), often in contexts "as legitimate citizens who are always at risk of being discriminated against" (Lugo, 2008, p. 116). Here we answer the call for border literacy research outside of the physical borderlands (Degollado et al., 2021) to understand how transborder

parents and children located far from a geopolitical border engage in literacy events around papers to access their rights within and across the nations they consider home. This research can offer insights on border literacies for families crossing geopolitical, racial, institutional and cultural borders across the globe by highlighting their fluid and subversive engagement in literacy practices around papers to access their children's full rights.

Transborder Approaches

Our research adopts a transborder lens, a decolonizing approach which recognizes that movements across borders are not simple processes, nor do they end: Transborder stories are not just stories of arrival or assimilation, or about the lines that mark the official boundaries of nation-states (Anzaldúa, 1987; Dyrness & Sepúlveda, 2020; Mignolo, 2000). Transborder people experience an in-betweenness as part of their everyday lives that actively counters the assumption of mononational and monolingual lives as a norm, pushing against the expectations that those norms should be aspired to (Anzaldúa, 1987; Dyrness & Sepúlveda, 2020; Mignolo, 2000). Additionally, transborder people draw on their experiences on the margins to build and actively utilize subaltern knowledges (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016; Mignolo, 2000) to navigate institutions while living without formal documentation. Depending on their place of birth, transborder family members often have varying access to legal recognition—a reality that literally shapes the spaces and ways of life that are possible for both individual members, and the family as a whole (Dyrness & Sepúlveda, 2020). An approach that centers transborder literacies looks to understand how people are able to make sense of these realities, determining how things are done aquí y allá, and seeks to create disrupting possibilities beyond the structures and expectations of one country or another (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Transborder Literacies of (In)Visibility

Families in this study engaged in what we call transborder literacies of (in)visibility, creative interactions around texts to facilitate their movement across institutions divided by physical and metaphorical borders. As we will illustrate, transborder literacies of (in)visibility include the following types of practices:

Institutional brokering. The national systems of families' lives did not speak the same language, both literally and figuratively, requiring diasporic families to strategically translate incompatible systems and their cultural expectations with attention to what each nation needs to know and cannot be told (Orellana, 2009). For example, birth certificates in the U.S., where a single or hyphenated last name is the norm, often mis-spell Mexican origin people's paternal and maternal surnames. When parents then register their children's Mexican nationality, Mexican authorities may deny them access to their children's Mexican documents because of different spellings, hyphens, or accent marks. Parents must find creative solutions across these incompatible systems to acquire their children's national belonging across nation-states.

Documenting against undocumentedness. Although in theory the possession of a document such as a birth certificate or expired passport should suffice to prove access and belonging to a nation-state, within the racialized systems of diasporic people's lives they had to accumulate and protect a plethora of textual artifacts to meet an elevated burden of proof of both of their identity and right to access.

Dexterity across invisibility and hypervisibility. As families engaged in practices around texts, they often decided what, when, and how to reveal aspects of their lives in

> order to receive access to their rights as citizens of the U.S., Mexico, or both. These practices varied based on family members' differing citizenships and required skillful movement amid challenging tensions: as they engaged in trámites around texts to gain access for some family members, others were placed in danger for increased surveillance and exclusion.

As we describe below, our understanding of these practices is informed by scholarship on the literacies employed by transborder communities building lives crossing fronteras.

Literature Review

Papeles and Literacy

Scholars have demonstrated how birth certificates, passports, social security cards, and other identification cards are the texts—papeles—that provide access (or exclusion) to movement across nations and institutions (Mangual Figueroa, 2012; Nuñez & Urietta, 2021; Vieira, 2016). Papeles are written texts, requiring a specific set of literacy skills from those tasked with using their papers to access tangible rights. In her work on papers and literacy for immigrants of various statuses within the U.S., Vieira (2016) highlights how simple pieces of paper like passports are powerful and authoritative in people's lives: "texts are strong, because some of the most powerful contemporary institutions, whose authority is supported by constellations of state enforcers, say they are" (p. 13). As Nuñez and Urietta (2021) illustrate with their work on children in the borderlands who regularly cross for schooling, papers—supported by national infrastructures of surveillance, access, and exclusion—are the key texts during the literacy events of border inspections, and these papers represent a minimum requirement for children to prove their right to cross. Yet these textual documents do not only matter at check points along the physical border; they are reconfigured during everyday institutional interactions inside of nations

to access education, employment, and healthcare (Mangual Figureoa, 2012; Vieira, 2016). Access to papers anchored to specific nation-states requires high stakes, gatekeeping literacy practices that deeply shape people's lives (Nuñez & Urietta, 2021; Vieira, 2016).

Practices of Visibility and Invisibility

Access to papers holds important consequences for day-to-day decision-making in transborder families. For individuals living in the U.S. without access to U.S. papers, this requires developing a series of practices that can facilitate living and working in the U.S. through the careful determination of when to be "seen" or subject to inspection by authorities (Lugo, 2008) and when and how to ensure they remain unseen (Minian, 2018). The dexterity of transborder families navigating lives shaped through differential access to papeles constitute a series of literacy practices developed and shared within communities (Lee, 2005; Minian, 2018). These practices are ones that have been enacted for as long as migrants have entered the U.S. by crossing policed borders, with choices and strategies differentially invoked depending on access to papeles, shifting immigration policies, and changing enforcement practices at and beyond the physical border. Examples of these literacy practices include Chinese immigrants and their communal networks who defied the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 through strategic practices of (in)visibility (Lee, 2005), Mexican migrants carefully tracking the routes, routines, and practices of immigration agents (Minian, 2018), and current transborder students who have paid close attention to the best practices to embody when legally crossing the U.S.-Mexico border on their way to school (Nuñez & Urrieta, 2021). As Omogun and Skerrett (2021) highlight in their scholarship with Black immigrants in contexts of anti-Black immigration policies like Trump's travel ban for people from Muslim-majority countries in Africa, "not only are these policies deeply rooted in White nationalist and White supremacist ideologies, but they also uphold the

racism and xenophobia that have historically characterized the United States" (p. 407). Depending on access to papers and the status of one's family members, individuals develop literacy practices of (in)visibility as they navigate when and how to be recognized by, or remain outside of the sight of, government authorities.

Family-Based Border-Crossing Pedagogies

In contrast to the ways documentation status is rarely broached within schools (Author, Year A; Jefferies & Dabach, 2014; see Author, Year C and de los Ríos & Molina, 2020 for exceptions) caregivers often engage in important educational practices to prepare children to navigate borders and institutions as members of undocumented families. Much of this scholarship has centered on the ways mothers of the diaspora teach their children to counter deficit messages about being Latinx or undocumented (Elenes et al., 2001; Oliveira, 2018) and has demonstrated the ways they socialize their children to speak up and take action against anti-immigrant injustices (Author, Year A; Mangual Figueroa, 2013; Rusoja, 2022). A subset of research has centered on how fathers draw upon practices such as advice giving, humor, and playful rehearsals of racialized surveillance encounters to prepare their children to navigate the world without official papers (Author, Year B). These ways of knowing are crucial for transborder children who must navigate across shifting racial, linguistic, and cultural borders and institutions, although such pedagogies are rarely incorporated or leveraged in their classrooms (Author, Year D; Omogun & Skerrett, 2021). We build upon this research through an exploration of transborder families' literacy practices around acquiring, protecting, and renewing papeles to cross the geopolitical and institutional borders dividing their diasporic lives.

Methods

Local Context

The study occurred in four small agrarian towns in the state of Puebla in Mexico, far from the physical Mexico-U.S. border. There were large numbers of transborder families in these towns due to diasporic relocations to the U.S. beginning in the 1990s, when young people without access to official U.S. documentation left for better economic security. Over the next decades while living in the U.S., many of these individuals had children whose U.S. birth granted them citizenship. U.S-born children also had access to Mexican citizenship because of their parents' nationality. Since 2010 many families had returned to their Mexican hometowns because of deportation, to reunite with their extended family and cultural roots, or because of health concerns. As such, transborder families were often comprised of members with different types and pathways to access citizenship rights within and across U.S. and Mexican institutions. Parents and younger siblings born in Mexico could not access U.S. papers, whereas children who had been born while their parents were living in the U.S. were U.S. citizens, but needed to go through formal processes to access their Mexican citizenship documents such as their Clave Unica de Registro de Población (CURP), a requirement for accessing school in Mexico. Border crossings and inspections also differed among family members based on their papers and directionality of their movement, as everyone could cross the geopolitical border from the U.S. to Mexico, but only those with U.S. citizenship could easily and visibly cross the same border from Mexico into the U.S. As we will demonstrate, successful border crossings and accessing U.S. and Mexican institutions for varying family members required a range of literacy practices across incompatible mononational systems.

This study also unfolded during the 2016-2017 academic year, when Trump was elected U.S. president, fostering a context in which children, parents, and educators regularly voiced concerns and questions regarding the well-being of their undocumented family members (see

also Author, Year C) or, as seen in the opening vignette, if the new administration could revoke their U.S.-born children's citizenship. This context spurred many families to renew their children's U.S. passports, which requires a set of literacy practices including filling out a form in English, acquiring the appropriately sized photograph, making an online appointment at the U.S. embassy in Mexico City where applicants are interviewed and must prove their identity and previous U.S. experiences, having access to an address where DHL delivers, and paying $110, a significant expense for most families. These texts played a central role in the critical literacy events analyzed here.

Data Collection & Participants

The findings presented draw from a yearlong ethnographic study conducted by Author 1 in Mexican schools and communities with 10 focal students who had recently relocated from the U.S. Through weekly participant observation in schools and communities the larger study explored the intersections of (im)migration and education policies and sought to understand how transborder students' linguistic and experiential resources were recognized and leveraged in Mexican schools. Here we shift our attention to community and family spaces to better understand the ways diasporic families engaged around texts to access their children's rights to institutions within and across borders.

During school, community, and family observations transborder families developed trusting relationships with Author 1 and en confianza came to her with two requests: 1) support in navigating issues related to documentation for family members across the U.S. and Mexico and 2) English classes for their U.S.-born children to prepare them for potential futures across the border. To collectively support these requests Author 1 offered bi-monthly community workshops for transborder families housed in a local elementary school on Saturday mornings. In

one classroom volunteer teachers from Fulbright taught English classes with transborder children and in another Author 1 facilitated dialogues and workshops in Spanish with caregivers based on their interests, such as how to support one another when relocating from the U.S. or how to apply for their children's U.S. passports. Workshops lasted 3-4 hours each and were attended by 8 to 12 transborder adults from local communities. Most caregivers were in their thirties with elementary school-aged children, had lived in the U.S. without official documentation, had moved back to their hometowns within the past five years, and were considering their children's diasporic relocation back to the U.S. to visit family or attend school. The corpus of data in this article centers on families who were renewing their children's U.S. passports and includes participant observation during bi-monthly community workshops (N=5), informal visits with community members (N =10), visits to families' homes (N= 9) and interviews with parents (N= 7) and children (N=10) seeking to renew U.S. passports from Mexico.

Data Analysis

Our ethnographic analyses iteratively drew patterns from the data to center on themes central in transborder families' lives (Emerson, et al., 2011) as they navigated access to key educational institutions in Mexico and the U.S. During observations Author 1 jotted down pertinent notes and then typed detailed fieldnotes, separating observations from evaluations, connections, and questions. Participants selected the time, place, and language(s) for their audio-recorded interviews, which occurred in families' homes or in quiet locations at school. Interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours, with most averaging about an hour. Monthly in-process memos (Emerson, et al., 2011) provided further direction during field work, through an examination of topics like "sibling passport privileges," and "citizenship." Once data collection was complete, interviews were transcribed by a local bilingual transcriber.

Findings presented here underwent two rounds of coding by both authors using the qualitative coding software Atlas.TI (see the data repository for our codebook). During the first round we open coded the corpus which led to a list of 41 codes emerging from both etic (theories like 'Transborder') and emic (phrases like 'Es su país') codes (Saldaña, 2015). We then discussed how the codes fit together around key groupings, or code families, that signaled emergent themes. We then re-coded a subset of the corpus to refine, eliminate, and add codes to complete our final codebook. Our codebook is comprised of 52 codes organized into 7 families--Visibility; Invisibility; Border Inspection; Transborder; Papers; Literacies; and Imagined Futures and our findings are broadly organized around these code families. For example, the practices related to Institutional Brokering came from data coded from the code families Papers, Literacies, and Transborder. This codebook was used for a final round of coding of the corpus to center our findings on the transborder literacy practices enacted by families as they navigated the disjunctured institutional systems and borders in their lives during the U.S. passport application process.

Subjectivities

We engage in humanizing research approaches that prioritize the importance of questioning relationships of power and privilege, challenging inequities, dismissing notions of objectivity and fostering relationships of dignity (Paris, 2011). Author 1 is an English-Spanish speaking bilingual white woman from the U.S. who forms part of a transborder family in which we live and learn, separated and apart due to differential access to U.S. papers, across the Mexico-U.S. border. As such, trust was developed with families over time as she shared in some of the realities families navigate, such as accessing national documents of belonging for her children across systems in Mexico and the U.S. that are often 'illegible' to each other and

parenting across borders based on the unequal ways she and her partner can cross the geopolitical border of their diasporic lives. Yet unlike most parents from this study, she benefits from systems of privilege through her whiteness, U.S. passport, and access to formal education, in which she is rarely questioned or doubted in transborder literacy events. Author 2 identifies as a Honduran-American Latina who experienced a transnational childhood, spending the school year in the U.S. and summers with extended family in Tegucigalpa. From a young age, she was aware of the access to travel granted by her U.S. passport, in contrast to her Honduran-born family members, and she could also recognize the different rights and wrongs required to navigate everyday life in two separate nation-states. As a young adult, she spent 7 years as a bilingual elementary school teacher in Texas whose students largely came from mixed-status families, and worked with those families as they attempted to navigate the U.S. school system to access educational opportunities for their children. Our experiences shape our interest in the practices and knowledge exhibited by transborder families and commitments to centering these literacy practices, described below, in schooling.

Findings

In this section we trace family's transborder literacies of (in)visibility as they engage in innovative interactions around texts that prepare them to move across borders. Our findings are organized around the three practices outlined in our framework. We begin by showing how families creatively brokered across incompatibilities within U.S. and Mexican institutions to access their children's national rights. These literacy events often unfolded collectively, such as parents coming together at a community workshop to complete their children's U.S. passport applications, or alongside their children to teach them about the inequities of access to border crossing. We then focus on how families drew upon their subaltern experiences to protectively

engage in practices of documenting against undocumentedness, painstakingly collecting an array of texts to prove their U.S.-born children's authentic histories in the U.S. to guard against authorities who might discount their children's claims to national belonging. In the final section we unearth complex tensions that can unfold for families in these transborder literacy practices when the hypervisible documentation needed to procure their U.S.-born children's papers required risking an undocumented family member's invisibility, a buffer from a potential deportation. Across these three types of transborder literacy practices we highlight how families creatively drew upon their experiences with multiplicity and marginalization to ensure their children's rights to cross borders.

Institutional Brokering

Importance of papeles. Papeles, or papers, represent textual artifacts, often requiring complex processes of translation and certification for legibility across countries. They are the documents facilitating border crossing and institutional access. Most transborder families knew their U.S.-born children's U.S. papers needed to be certified (apostillado) in the U.S. to be recognized and translated in Mexico. Texts like their certified U.S. birth certificates also served as a prerequisite to obtain their children's Mexican birth certificate, Mexican nationality, and CURP to access Mexican schooling and healthcare (Medina & Menjívar, 2015). Families drew upon their transborder knowledges of differing mononational norms to broker these documents across contexts. For example, they realized most people in the U.S. only have a single original of their U.S. birth certificate to show at gatekeeping events (like obtaining a license, enrolling in school), but rarely handed over to government agencies. This differs from norms in Mexico, in which the government requires the submission of an original birth certificate with an apostille and official translation that will never be returned. Families drew upon transborder strategies

such as acquiring, certifying, and translating several originals of their children's U.S. birth certificates before they left to Mexico, as access to these documents can be challenging as an adult without U.S. papers outside of U.S. territory. Mobile families drew upon their experiences with multiplicity—in the different ways that textual artifacts like birth certificates were utilized in literacy events related to institutional access—to engage in transborder literacy practices that could be legible by institutions on both sides of the border.

Transborder families were keenly aware of the importance of these papers. Linda[2] described the plane trip with her two U.S.-born children from New York when they relocated to her Mexican hometown. Drawing upon their transborder knowledges, she and her husband had strategically completed their children's Mexican documents in the Mexican consulate in the U.S. prior to their move, where the process was less expensive and more streamlined compared with completing it once in Mexico (FN, 12/4/16). She had carefully placed all their birth certificates and documents in a carry-on suitcase to keep them safe, but the airline had to check this bag. When she arrived in Mexico City all her suitcases were there except the maletita with their papeles. As she engaged in the literacy event of completing the missing luggage report, she began to cry and explained this suitcase was the only one that mattered because "of my children's papers….everything is in there…my things no longer mattered to me- I needed my papers, mis papeles[3]!" (Interview 5/30/17). To her relief the airline found this suitcase several days later, reuniting her with the necessary documents to enroll her U.S.-born children in Mexican schools and healthcare.

While she flew with her children to Mexico, her husband Jayson loaded up their pick-up truck with the artifacts from a decade of life in New York and spent a night at the border "to arrange the car's documentation, so it could cross legally, [because] just like the children, the car

crossed like a Mexican" (Interview 6/21/17). Jayson and Linda drew upon their transborder ways of knowing (e.g., the costs and institutional processes on both sides of the border) and literacy practices (e.g., paperwork, extra copies of key documents, and appointments in English and Spanish) to broker and secure the literal papers their U.S.- born children and belongings needed to legally reside in Mexico.

Not every family was able to broker their U.S.-born children's papers in Mexico, which caused significant challenges for access to Mexican institutions and a return to the U.S. (Medina & Menjívar, 2015). Alondra had broken up with her daughter's father while living in the U.S. and had since relocated to her hometown in Mexico without him. When they moved, she did not have an original copy of her daughter Brenda's U.S. birth certificate, the text she needed to acquire her daughter's Mexican nationality and CURP to officially enroll in school. The elementary school principal had bent the rules and allowed Brenda to attend school, but soon Brenda would graduate. Alondra explained their predicament: "They won't let her into middle school because she doesn't have her CURP and her birth certificate from here, so what can I do? Also, her passport has expired for her to be able to travel to the U.S." (Interview 6/27/17). Alondra had adult children still residing in the U.S. and wanted to send Brenda to live and study there, but Brenda's estranged father, whose name was on her birth certificate, would not cooperate with the required notarized form to renew her U.S. passport, and Alondra did not have any documented way to prove she had sole custody. Alondra and Brenda painfully understood the power and material consequences of papers: they experienced limited success at brokering their transborder literacy practices, largely because of the increased disjunctures across mononational systems that Alondra had to navigate as a single mother in a co-parenting relationship of discord.

Brokering the U.S. passport application. Many parents requested advice on how to complete the application for their children's U.S. passport, which—along with the instructions via the travel.state.gov pages once Trump took office—were only available in English. During one community workshop we brought our laptop, passport applications, and step-by-step instructions we had written in Spanish, and met up with about a dozen transborder parents looking to renew their children's U.S. passports. Beyond the literal translation of the document from English to Spanish, we worked together to navigate differences that did not easily travel across national contexts, such as the inclusion of both last names, making sure to use the correct month/day format for dates, converting height and weight from the metric to the imperial system, and deciphering how to translate the nuanced categories of Mexican skin tones, hair colors, and eye shades to the blunt categories of phenotype offered (FN 4/22/17). We modeled and provided detailed instructions on how to sign up for an interview at the U.S. embassy in Mexico City, a process only available in English online. We also worked to problem-solve a significant disjuncture in the application process, which is tailored to wealthier transborder families who live in cities: the passport had to be delivered via DHL, which was not available in the small towns where families lived.

For mixed-status families in Mexico the literacy event of a passport application required crossing a range of borders—linguistically, across naming and measurement systems, digital and paper forms, and to find locations within the DHL delivery map. Hegemonic practices for papeles—practices steeped in colonizing histories and hierarchies—were not designed with transborder families' experiences or interests in mind, and to combat their exclusion families worked collectively—drawing upon their range of border-crossing experiences within and across mononational systems—to complete their children's U.S. passport applications. As we

demonstrate below, these collaborative literacy events also occurred within families, as parents taught children how inequitable systems of access to papers shaped their families' lives.

Literacy events: Teaching about papers. Parents' translation work around papers in Mexican and U.S. institutions also occurred at home with their children, as they engaged in literacy events around access and exclusion, drawing upon subaltern experiences from life without papers to teach their children about systems of inequity within and across borders (Dyrness & El-Haj, 2019). When Jayson's 7-year-old son found a folder with his important documents, he asked to see his passaporte americano, so Jayson took the documents out and explained that:

> his had his baby picture and my son said, 'but it doesn't look like me' and I told him 'but look, your name is here, right now yours is expired but we can renew this in Mexico City…look, this is your U.S. birth certificate, you were born at such hour, in the hospital in New York, and these are all of your American papers. Here in this folder are all of your Mexican papers…everything is separated…and here are your sister's, and your sister's Mexican papers.' And he says to me, 'And you don't have any?' I said, 'no, I don't have papeles americanos son, I don't have them, I wasn't born there, I couldn't acquire a legal status, I couldn't, but you (and your sister) can…if you want you two can go to the U.S.' (Interview, 6/21/17)

Linda, his wife, also reflected on this important transborder literacy event, describing how her children "start to read and their U.S. passport is in English and they see it says U.S.A, and the other one says Mexico" (Interview 5/30/17). Within the context of their mixed-status family, the textual artifacts of their varying papers created spaces for critical literacy events in which children were guided by parents to read pertinent information on their documents (locations of

identifying photos, official names, location of birth) and recognized the multilingual nature of these identifying texts. Physically seeing who in their family lacked a U.S. folder provided a concrete entryway into the abstract reality of their family's transborder lives: the presence and absence of papeles required understanding differences in accessing movements across border.

Differences in family members' papers also opened spaces for young transborder children to critically question these inequities, leading their son to ask about his Mexican-born sibling "but my little brother—how is he going to be able to go there [to the U.S.]"? (Interview, 5/30/17). These familial literacy events laid a foundation for children to understand systems of inequity regarding pathways to border crossing and planted seeds for young transborder students to critique colonial legacies impacting who gets to move and belong across borders (Dyrness & El-Haj, 2019; Mignolo, 2000).

Documenting Against Undocumentedness

Subaltern knowledges. Parents in transborder families described the discriminatory practices they had navigated as Latinx undocumented immigrants residing in the U.S., where they were physically attacked for being Mexican (Jayson FN 10/3/16), pulled over under false pretense and deported (David FN 7/7/17; Lily Interview 5/27/17) ridiculed for not speaking English (Jayson FN 10/3/16), or blackmailed to tolerate below-code housing rentals because of their migratory status (Edwin FN 5/16/17). Within Mexico they also reflected upon the discriminatory treatment they received in government offices like consulates and schools because of their working-class backgrounds (David FN 7/7/17; Linda FN 12/04/16). These experiences with life at the margins informed their approaches to a second key practice in transborder literacies: documenting against undocumentedness, practices of accumulating and protecting a range of textual artifacts to prove

authentic belonging to the U.S. in contexts where they knew their children's legitimate citizenship could be questioned (Lugo, 2008).

As reflected in the opening vignette, during the time of this study the Trump administration had sought to remove birthright citizenship, a Constitutional guarantee under the 14th amendment, and attempted to revoke the U.S. citizenship of some individuals born along the border, claiming their papers were falsified. Particularly in this context, families were aware that the possession of a document like a U.S. birth certificate or expired passport would likely not satisfy the burden of proof their racialized children might face to re-cross the border into the U.S. or re-apply for their U.S. passport from Mexico. Their deterritorialized realities mattered: transborder families residing inside the U.S. did not have to apply for their children's passports to physically re-enter the U.S. (because they are already there) or face the surveillance of embassy-based interviews for passports (which differed from the post-office based application process in the U.S.) in the ways experienced by transborder families abroad. As the following field note illustrates, families gathered a range of textual proof to support their claims:

> As we sat in the courtyard of their home and drank guayaba juice made from the trees in their jardín, we started with Edwin's passport papers. As we talked, they pulled out many different records- pictures from his U.S. preschool, a Mother's Day book, a year book, his social security card., his U.S. birth certificate, his Mexican birth certificate that said he was born in the U.S. with the apostillado officially translated in Spanish, mom's obstetrician book, Edwin's vaccination book, and his footprints on a paper from the Lutheran hospital where he was born. (FN 5/16/17).

Edwin, a 15 year-old, had moved to Mexico as a kindergartner, which meant his parents had begun this transborder textual archiving in anticipation of his future border crossing over a

decade beforehand. Many transborder parents without U.S. papers cross borders with limited planning time (because of deportations) and with limited space to securely transport their belongings (because of clandestine border crossing to the U.S. or luggage restrictions back to Mexico). Whereas families living mononational lives might not see the need to retain all these artifacts for reasons beyond nostalgia, families whose lives involve border-crossings recognize that papeles matter, even those that may not seem directly related to legal paperwork. They amass papers to prove a life that was lead. As such, the transborder literacy practice of documenting against undocumentedness is uniquely developed as they move and prepare for future movements (both planned and forced) across borders.

Gatekeeping interviews. Transborder parents also prepared their children for the range of procedures to re-acquire their U.S. passport, which entailed not only submitting the standard passport application, photo, and fees, but also an embassy interview to prove your identity and legitimate ties to the U.S. Jayson and Linda's 9 year-old daughter explained her understanding of these processes: "In Mexico City they ask you about everything: your name, birthdate, which hospital you were born in…and you have to fill all of this in. When you've filled in the sheet, they take your picture, glue it on, and they give you the form" (Interview 6/27/17). When asked what you can do with these papers she responded, "I can travel back and forth" (between Mexico and the U.S.). Many transborder parents prepared their children for the literacy practices of successfully applying for a U.S. passport, which included ways of knowing and acting around the texts of their passport applications and file, such as the interview at the U.S. embassy or engaging with the immigration official upon exiting the airplane.

Like caregivers in Núñez and Urietta's (2021) study on children's embodied literacies of border inspections, parents here sought to ensure their children would know how to make their

papers legible to a potentially intimidating official who may scrutinize their claims. They also found ways to circumvent their children's fears, as working-class members of the Latinx diaspora, of potential aggressive treatment from immigration authorities. For example, in conversation after filling out his passport application, Jayson's 7 year-old son asked what he should do if immigration officers grabbed him in the airport. Jayson responded "the people they pick up there are people who have been involved in bad things—you are not. You are going to pass right through, you'll get on the plane and go to the U.S. with your uncles, they'll pick you up from the airport, and nothing will happen to you" (Interview 6/21/17). The specific strategies and embodied literacy practices of children re-applying for their documents far from the physical border may differ from those of transfronterixs who cross the border daily for school (de la Piedra et al., 2018), but caregivers' attention to carefully support their children and prepare them for a racialized reading of their papers is an important literacy practice in many transborder families.

Unable to document. There are instances in which families were not able to securely acquire and maintain their U.S.-born children's documents, which caused significant obstacles in accessing Mexican institutions and re-crossing into the U.S. As the experiences of David and his family illustrate, at times the racialized implementation of im/migration policies shape transborder children's access to institutions on both sides of the border. David was a father without U.S. documentation living in Texas who was questionably pulled over for a minor traffic violation, which eventually led to his deportation to Mexico. When he was detained, he had his son's U.S. birth certificate, which he had already apostilled, in preparation for having to return to Mexico at any time due to his own precarious status without U.S. papers. David explained, "when they freed me—well, to come here [to Mexico], I fought for these papers. I said, 'what the

heck—My documents? My son's birth certificate?' [the immigration officer responded], 'Well, these documents stay here. They are property of the United States.'' (Interview, 7/7/17). Racialized systems fostered a context in which a Mexican immigrant father had his U.S.-born son's documents unlawfully stolen from him by a U.S. immigration officer without consequence. His son had returned to Mexico as an infant and therefore had limited schooling documentation to bolster his U.S.-born experiences, and his parents had left within the context of a deportation in which they could not procure key documents to prove his identity or U.S.-experiences.

Over the next 8 years David's family drew upon an array of impressive transborder knowledges in an attempt to secure their son's birth certificate from Texas—these ranged from working with guards in the U.S. immigration holding facility to send a request for his son's birth certificate, sending family members from California to vital records in Texas, mailing a request and money to vital records from Mexico which was denied because they did not have a Texas drivers' license or mailing address, and going to the U.S. embassy in Mexico City to ask for assistance (Interview, 7/7/17). Yet Texas laws, which made it challenging for undocumented parents residing in Texas to acquire copies of their U.S-born children's birth certificates, had loopholes that made it almost impossible for deterritorialized parents without U.S. documentation now living abroad. The material consequences were significant: David's son was unable to officially enroll in Mexican public schools, receive healthcare, and could not acquire his U.S. passport to return to the U.S. for schooling (Interview 7/7/17). His father lamented: "It's like he doesn't exist… He doesn't exist here because no one has a single document to declare that my son is here in Mexico" (Interview 7/6/17). Highly racialized immigration systems in which a Mexican immigrant father could be robbed of the textual documents that proved his son's existence, entrenched in xenophobic laws that appeared to systematically and intentionally

complicate undocumented parents' access to their children's papers (especially once outside the U.S.) fostered major disjunctures across mononational systems that David's subaltern transborder literacy practices could not easily overcome.

Dexterity across Invisibility and Hypervisibility

The final key practice in families' transborder literacies entailed their nimble movement across literacy practices of invisibility—to evade surveillance and exclusion from the U.S. for members without U.S. documentation—and hyperdocumentation through government-related channels to secure their U.S.-born children's textual existence in U.S. systems. At times the process of applying for their children's U.S. passports created conflicting priorities, requiring families risk extended surveillance for undocumented family members residing in the U.S.

Undocumented and invisible. Undocumented parents' border crossing did not entail hyperdocumentation with a folder of textual artifacts to prove their belonging to the U.S., an interview in an embassy, or passing the airport checkpoint with their U.S. passport after a quick 5-hour flight. Without access to U.S. papers, they navigated long, costly, arduous journeys in which they hid from officials at check-points so they could cross clandestinely into the U.S., un-detected. As one 9 year-old explained, her parents "say that when they crossed it was complicated. My mom says she was walking and walking, and she was very hungry and thirsty. She only had a small bottle of water and nothing else. And, well, my father crossed hiding on the underside of a truck" (Interview 6/27/17).

Employment without U.S. papers relied on complex networks of borrowed or invented U.S. identities, driving in most states required hoping you were never stopped for a traffic infraction because undocumented immigrants were unable to acquire valid licenses, and on-going contracts with companies ranging from cell-phone plans to credit cards often required a

social security number for access (see also Gonzales, 2016). U.S. institutions systematically excluded undocumented immigrants, and undocumented immigrants usually sought to evade attention or textual evidence of their unauthorized existence in U.S. systems that increasingly criminalized their very presence. (see Author, Year A).

Indeed, some families reported their fear of using hospitals in the U.S. when their children were injured, such as Talía's family, who didn't want to take their toddler to the hospital in New York after getting badly burned during a cookout "for fear that they [child protective services (CPS)] would take her away because we didn't care for her well" (Interview, 6/13/17). Talía's hesitance to go to the hospital stemmed from her subaltern experiences living undocumented in the U.S. Although uncommon, hospitals can serve as de facto checkpoints where U.S. documentation is surveilled.[4] Accusations to CPS that brown, immigrant, undocumented parents were neglectful or abusive to their children could lead to surveillance from government authorities, and even in their children being removed from their care. In a context when the Trump Administration was systematically separating children from their parents at the border, Talía's subaltern knowledges guided her towards invisibility that could protect her from government surveillance far from the border. Other transborder families were also aware of "registers that I was there [in the U.S.] with my babies because we were in the hospital" and some assumed they were on a list for a ten-year ban before applying for a U.S. visa because their names were documented when they left the U.S. for Mexico, even though they were not deported (Linda, 5/30/17). Despite unauthorized family members' attempts to remain outside the surveilled gaze of the U.S. government, accessing U.S. institutions for their U.S.-born children often created traces of their unauthorized presence there.

Conflicting literacies of (in)visibility. Particularly for families with a parent still residing in the U.S. without documentation, the U.S. passport application process often engendered conflicting priorities of hypervisibility for some and invisibility for others. As literacy and migration scholar Kate Vieira highlights:

> Even not being deported requires encountering the border: To benefit from DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)…, qualifying individuals must identify themselves with immigration services. In interacting with these new reforms, people encounter the border, as it wends its way into their employment options, their imagination of the future, and their families, who may still be at risk. (2016, p. 6).

Talía explained she wanted to renew her U.S.-born daughters' passports before they expired because she wanted them to visit their father in the U.S. A friend had helped her fill out the passport application and make a cita at the embassy for their interviews, but she had started to worry that going through the process would somehow harm her husband, who was living in the U.S. without papers, so she stopped (FN 4/1/17). It was unlikely that her husband's U.S. address, which was requested in the passport application, would be repurposed to surveil or deport him. Nonetheless, particularly in the shifting boundaries of the Trump administration in which the possibility of weaponizing immigrants' personal information against them felt increasingly feasible, this concern was enough to stop some families from applying for their children's U.S. passports. In Talía's case, the materiality of this meant a prolonged family separation for her daughters because, without a U.S. passport, they could not visit their father.

Interpreting conflicting literacies of invisibility. We close the findings section with an illustration of how easily families' conflicting literacies of invisibility can be misinterpreted in ways that discount their transborder knowledges and careful navigation of racialized systems.

Mercedes was a transborder mother who had moved back to her hometown in Mexico due to a health emergency, and whose husband Enrique had returned without papers to the U.S. to pay off their family's hefty hospital bills from the health emergency. Mercedes cared for her three children, two of whom were born in the U.S. One of her U.S. children had extensive learning dis/abilities, and after witnessing his developmental and educational decline in Mexican schools where limited services were available, she decided to apply for her two U.S.-born children's passports so they could return to live and study with their father.

Mercedes voiced concerns related to the tensions of Enrique maintaining his invisibility alongside his children's hypervisibility in the endless border inspections that make up immigrants' lives once inside the U.S.—from his long drive to pick them up from the airport to the frequent meetings with doctors and educators related to their son's special needs—all of which might put him in danger for deportation if he were caught driving without a license (Interview 5/17/17). When filling out her children's passport applications she worried about including Enrique's address in the U.S., which was also required on an additional form he had to complete, have notarized, and mail from the U.S. since he could not be physically present at the passport interview in Mexico City. Ultimately, they decided it was worth the risk and applied for their children's passports.

Several weeks later their son's passport arrived, but the U.S. embassy contacted Mercedes via Author 1's email (Mercedes did not use an email account) informing her that they had not received a separate notarized form from Enrique for their daughter's passport. He had only sent one, thinking it applied to both children. Mercedes' family had 90 days to submit the notarized form, and if not, her daughter's case would be closed and she would have to start the application, interview, and payment process from the beginning. Over the coming weeks Mercedes and I

worked with Enrique to get the form re-printed and notarized, and we instructed him to mail it directly to the U.S. embassy in Mexico City (FN 2/1/2017). Several months later we received a message from the U.S. Embassy that their daughter's passport application had been cancelled because they did not receive the form. Rather than sending the form directly to the U.S. Embassy, Enrique had tried to send it quickly via DHL to Mercedes' home, but because DHL did not deliver in their remote small town, it never arrived (FN 7/11/17).

At the time I (Author 1) was perplexed and frustrated that Enrique had not sent the form directly to the embassy as he had said he would, and amidst this frustration I realized I was making assumptions about his transborder institutional savviness (FN 7/11/17). Yet re-examining this chain of literacy events from the perspective of conflicting literacies of invisibility, it seems likely that, as an undocumented parent residing in the U.S., mailing a notarized document with his U.S. home address directly to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico during the Trump administration may have felt dangerous. Rather than a careless mistake, his decision may have represented a way of reading racialized passport application processes from his life at the margins, drawing upon his transborder literacies of invisibility to creatively survive subaltern realities that were illegible through my white, U.S.-documented gaze. In this final section we extend these findings to envision how understandings of transborder literacies of (in)visibility could offer a novel, anti-oppressive lens to transform how educators make sense of the complexity of immigrant families' literacies, movements, and educational supports across borders and national schooling systems.

Discussion

Here we have focused on transborder families' literacy practices to bring attention to diasporic people's innovative interactions around texts that prepare them to move across

incompatible, mononational institutions divided by borders. Borders are "a geopolitical space where colonial difference is embodied and experienced in the literal demarcation and crossing of… boundaries," (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016, p. 282) and indeed there are differential power dynamics across physical borders, border-crossing bodies, and the types of literacy practices engaged in by border-crossers across space and time (see also Omogun & Skerrett, 2021). This article, situated in the experiences of families whose lives unfold between Mexico and the U.S., uniquely extends critical literacy research through a deterritorialization of mobile families' literacy practices as they creatively engage with the very texts needed to cross institutional and geopolitical borders to (re)access their children's rights.

We highlighted three types of literacy practices that grew out of families' experiences of multiplicity and marginalization within and across the borders of the countries they call home: institutional brokering in which they creatively made legible their children's existence across incompatible mononational systems; documenting against undocumentedness in which they strategically protected a range of documents to prove their children's legitimacy of belonging against racializing immigration practices; and literacies of dexterity across hypervisibility and invisibility in which they carefully weighed disclosures of undocumentedness to access visible documentation so that their children could access their rights across racializing national systems. In this final section we address how a transborder literacy of (in)visibility can disrupt and inform educational policy and literacy instruction.

Implications

Educational Policies for Transborder Schooling Access

What might it mean for our educational policies and practices to take transborder families' literacies of (in)visibility as the organizing force for school access? Policies could seek to support the realities of institutional brokering by rejecting presumptions of mononationalism, monolingualism, physical family unity, and limited movements across schooling systems and instead accept and radically support families' movements across borders. In U.S. schools this could mean setting up systems and staffing so that families could easily collect schooling documents in their additional languages such as report cards, explanations of curriculum, and certificates demonstrating graduation from elementary or middle school which are often required for school enrollment in families' additional countries. Such policies could also address families' strategy to document against undocumentedness, in which they carefully stockpile a range of documents to meet an elevated burden of proof to cross surveilled borders and institutions. Currently transborder families are often positioned as a nuisance or unreasonable for requesting these texts, which fall outside of U.S. schooling enrollment literacy practices. Investing resources to facilitate families' institutional brokering across borders could be an important step in centering mobile families' literacy practices to access institutions across the countries of their lives.

Centering families' strategic literacy practices across hypervisibility and invisibility could also lead to a recalibration of schools as places that better welcome and value transborder families. Current enrollment practices in most U.S. schools systematically create contexts in which families with undocumented members must deftly navigate between hypervisibility to access schooling for their children and invisibility to protect the identities and location of undocumented family members. This occurs when families must document where they live to prove catchment zones alongside photo identification that matches names on their children's

birth certificates. When undocumented parents engage in practices that might serve to maintain their invisibility (frequently changing addresses and phone numbers, not attending events that require background checks or mugshot-like photographs to enter school buildings), educators who are not critically aware of literacy practices of invisibility might assume they are untrustworthy, disinterested in their children's education, or even suspect. Recognizing and building from these transborder literacies requires, at a minimum, that educators build an awareness of the tensions families must navigate between literacies of (in)visibility for school access. Radical solidarity could also include new enrollment processes that move away from documentation of addresses and identities to enroll in and enter schools. Such policies would take seriously the goal of truly serving as sanctuary spaces for transborder children and their families by adopting "approaches to reading and writing that affirm the rights, dignity, humanity, legal protection, and futurity of immigrant communities," or what de los Ríos and Molina term "literacies of refuge" (2020, pp. 33-34).

Imagining a Transborder Literacies Pedagogy

Schools across borders operate as sites of assimilation, where only certain literacy practices are recognized as valid and valuable (Patel, 2018; de los Ríos & Molina, 2020). A transborder literacies pedagogy acknowledges that schools "have played an unseemly role in this colonization and have used literacy, partly because of its catalytic power, to do this work" (Patel, 2018, p. 525). Border pedagogies seek to un-do these literacy legacies—they are a form of critical pedagogy designed around texts and curriculum connected to students' lives, where all engage in critical analysis of the naturalization of power and domination and the potential to fight back. A decolonizing border pedagogy "goes beyond an uncritical embracement of 'hybridity' (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016, p. 282), such as a meshing of doing literacy in

Spanish in Mexico and English in the U.S., and instead calls for a radical, decolonizing approach to schooling that "repositions people on the margins as creators, thinkers, and knowers" (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, p. 286).

We imagine a transborder literacy pedagogy where educators center families' dexterous ways of reading and writing around papeles, as part of their efforts to de-center and critique traditional hegemonizing hierarchies around what counts as literacy. In classrooms this means centering transborder students' lives and movements in the curriculum, actively learning from and with people whose lives unfold across borders by engaging in pedagogies that re-position the teacher as a careful listener and learner who makes space for students' complex subaltern experiences and uncertainties (Osorio, 2015). It means including literature by transborder authors like Duncan Tonituah, Yuyi Morales, Elizabeth Acevedo, or Ibi Zoboi. Rather than rote, individual, autonomous literacy work that often dominates transborder students' literacy experiences, literacy curriculum should build from the robust collective, language-crossing practices evident in many of the transborder literacy events described here.

Families' transborder literacies of (in)visibility included moments where parents taught their children to interrogate disjunctures and inequities, such as through differential access to U.S. papers, serving as opportunities for young people to make sense of, and potentially challenge, systems of inequities unfolding within and across their families, communities, and homelands (Dyrness & El-Haj, 2019). Rather than being positioned as inappropriate or dangerous for classroom learning, this should be a centerpiece of schools' literacy curriculum. A transborder literacies of (in)visibility framework invites a literacy curriculum built from the reality that children make multiple cross-border moves, sometimes separated from their parents

because of racializing immigration policies, and demands that scholars, educators, and policy makers shift to positioning movement across borders as normal rather than problematic.

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[1] Mixed-status families include members with varying citizenship and immigration statuses (see Mangual Figueroa, 2012).

[2] All participants' names are pseudonymns.

[3] All direct quotes occurred in Spanish and were translated by the authors.

[4] This article illustrates Talía's careful navigation of hospitals as an undocumented immigrant: https://apnews.com/article/immigration-miami-us-news-ap-top-news-border-patrols-52a38ce1d4b84e289b8073b47674514e