

EXPERIENCING TRANSNATIONALISM:
ENGAGING YOUNG-ADULT STUDENTS IN ACADEMIC LITERACY PRACTICES

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my first teachers.

To Dr. Milagros Mateu,
who taught me the meaning of perseverance
through her living example.

To the memory of Elpidio Collazo,
who taught me how to run a marathon and
to always finish what I start.

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FOREWARD

I come to this work as a Puerto Rican woman, born in San German, a small town in Puerto Rico, and having grown up in urban and suburban neighborhoods of New York and Massachusetts. As the daughter of first generation, bilingual college graduates, I grew up learning both the English language and academic discourses in school and at home. I remember reading nightly bed time stories with my mom as a child and my dad helping me to write papers for English class, essays for contests, and applications for college.

I was also pulled out of my second grade class to sit in a “reading lab,” listen to tapes, and “practice” reading. I vividly remember the day my mother learned of this remedial placement and the pursuant confrontation between herself and my teacher. During this heated interaction the teacher explained that they placed me in the “special” reading class due to my surname and because I came from a “bilingual” family. I do not recall all the words exchanged, but the next day I did not leave class to go to the reading lab. The following year my mother received a call from the school informing her that I had tested 5 grades above grade level. The irony here was that my parents spoke to me primarily in English; my present knowledge of Spanish was gained from listening to adult conversations between my parents and friends and family members and many years of Spanish language classes, and study abroad. Somehow my teacher assumed my bilingual status, and interpreted the knowledge of *two* languages, as an intellectual deficiency. This was my first experience with the deficit model.

After third grade my mother and I moved from Boston and its under-resourced public school system to the suburb of Brookline, Massachusetts, a nationally recognized school system. What I remember was that the classrooms were so large and the teacher was so welcoming. We sat at tables with our classmates instead of the rows I was used to in Boston, the room was brightly decorated, and there were multiple opportunities for reading on one's own, with the entire class, on the couch in the "reading nook," as well as writing reports, and developing projects. Each of these markers of classroom environment, curricula and instruction continue to be symbolic of the distinctions between under-resourced and resourced schools. Therefore, from 4th grade until high school graduation I benefited from these resources in multiple ways and these experiences created an academic base that I continue to build upon today.

However, there was also a cost to these experiences. I was the only Latina in my classes and often the only person of color, therefore academic success entailed bifurcating my identity in terms of culture. In other words there was no space within my school experiences to explore what it meant to be of Puerto Rican ancestry among my peers, or within my class work, and I consider this a loss in terms of a sense of community and roots, as well as my own intellectual development.

It was not until college that I could situate my experiences within a larger socioeconomic and political context and come to understand that the majority of young Latino/as grow up in low income, often racially segregated communities with accompanying under-resourced schools. Through my college courses, I came to understand that the deficit view I encountered from my second grade teacher was pervasive among many educators working with Latino/a and other youth of color, and

that the assessment of a students' bilingual status as a limitation and a hindrance to their education was a reflection of the racial and class positioning of the Spanish language and of the associated public discourse about Latino/as. These realizations led me to further questions—why was it that United States' schools failed so many Latino/a children? What would it mean to learn in an educational setting where one felt a sense of pride in their roots, or at the very least had the chance to consider their identity and the role of their ancestors within a larger U.S. historical narrative? These questions among others, initiated a journey that has taken me to several Latino/a communities throughout the United States and abroad and has culminated, for the moment, in this present dissertation project.

Thus, I come to this research informed by the perspectives I developed growing up as well as my work as an educator and researcher who has spent the past 15 years working with young people, teachers, and parents in urban Latino/a communities throughout the United States. My adult journey started with Puerto Rican and Dominican Latino/a communities of Providence, Rhode Island, continued with Mexicano/a and Chicano/as from Los Angeles, California, as well as Mexican American and Puerto Rican students and families residing in Detroit and Lansing, Michigan, and now rests with the Salvadoran/Central American youth and their families of the Washington, D.C. area who are the focus of this study. Throughout my career, I have worked in various schools and communities as a researcher, teacher, camp director, program manager, museum educator, “Big Sister” or volunteer. I have had the privilege of working with educators who respectfully and purposefully call their students to think and perform at high levels as they create multiple opportunities for them to deepen their understandings of their own

lived experiences. However, I all too often observed students who were alert and critical thinkers, situated in class settings where at best there was a lack of connection between the teacher and students and at worst antagonistic teacher-student relations. I have also observed and experienced the grueling demands placed on teachers and the sense that the youth I worked with had such high potential as well as high needs and I could only do so much to meet those needs. I have read dismal portrayals of “at-risk” youth within research articles that discuss high drop out rates, high teen pregnancy rates, disproportionate numbers of students in special education classes, and other “risk” factors. I contrast these structural realities with the vibrant young people I have met and worked with in city after city, people who ask insightful questions, are eager to learn, and describe day-to-day experiences to me that have relevance for the learning they do in school, yet go untapped by their teachers.

While there is a growing body of research describing the experiences young people of color have outside the school setting, there remains so much more we may learn not only about what young people know, but also about how to draw upon that knowledge in ways that will engage them in classroom learning and extend the experiences they bring to the class setting. It is through this lens—aware of the many economic and academic challenges faced by Latino/a youth and also cognizant of their potential—that I entered the research setting of this study and met the youth and educators who form the basis of this project. While I did not intend to write about their transnational experiences at the onset of this project, I learned from them about how important this reality was to their lives and learning. In the pages that follow, I aim to elucidate how these transnational experiences might translate into knowledge for the

students in ways that will be useful for educators working with a wide diversity of youth and educational professionals. My hope is that the research presented in this dissertation study will assist these educators (classroom based teachers and researchers) to create learning spaces where students may locate their lived experiences historically and politically. Furthermore, I hope that students may deepen their understandings of academic discourses in engaging ways that lead, not only to academic success and expanded opportunities, but critical engagement in their communities through out their lives.

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ABSTRACT

EXPERIENCING TRANSNATIONALISM:

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Co-Chairs: Elizabeth B. Moje and Carla O'Connor

This dissertation examines how Salvadoran students in an alternative high school in Washington, D.C. engaged in communication, economic, and literacy practices with individuals and institutions from their countries of origin, to leverage various resources of importance to their overall sense of well-being. Employing select qualitative methods, I focus on how my research participants interpreted their past and present realities in terms of the above transnational practices to engage classroom based literacy activities.

For more than a decade, young people and their families have migrated from Latin American countries at unprecedented levels and over time experienced depressed educational outcomes in the United States. With these shifting demographic trends and the compromised state of education for so many Latino students (immigrant and U.S. born) as a backdrop, this research considers how teachers and students enact transnational classroom contexts and engage youth in literacy activities.

Whereas past research has examined the inter-connections between students' lived experiences and school-based activity, and other work has offered theoretical and empirical insights into the meanings of transnationalism in the day-to-day lives of individuals and communities, few studies have examined the meaning of transnational experiences in the literacy activities of young adult students.

In the chapters that follow, I analyze how my research participants experienced transnationalism, interpreted these experiences through transnational frameworks, and then drew from these frameworks to engage reading and writing activities. In addition, I offer a detailed presentation of how the local and national contexts of these students' lives (in the United States and El Salvador) were influenced by various transnational forces over time. Overall, I found that classroom-based transnational practices were engaging for these students and that they demonstrated analytical thought regarding their school texts and other lived experiences. I also found that these processes of engagement were not monolithic and occurred along a continuum. Thus, working to cultivate classroom contexts by building upon the social context of students' lives, in this case, a transnational context is one important facet of engaging learning environments with implications for shifting educational outcomes for Latino students and other youth with similar life experiences.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation study is to consider how young adult¹, Salvadoran/Central American² migrants experience transnationalism through their day-to-day activities, and how they call upon those experiences to engage educational contexts in the United States. In particular, I explore how students in an alternative high school in Washington, D.C. called upon their lived experiences while participating in academic literacy activities—that is, classroom-based discussions as well as reading and writing assignments. Due to the legacies of civil wars and inconsistent access to schooling, many Salvadoran migrants, particularly those who migrated to DC during the 1980s, 1990s and early part of this decade, have low literacy proficiency in Spanish and English. At the same time students develop transnational lives and ways of knowing (see Heath, 1983) that are relevant to their in-school learning.

The following questions guide my analysis:

¹ I use the term “young adult” as opposed to adolescent to refer to students who range in age from 14-22, yet assume adult responsibilities as part of their day-to-day lives. For example, by working to contribute to the household rent, caring for their children, and/or dealing with their ex/husbands and wives, students were living as adults, rather than adolescents. Many were responsible for themselves in financial, emotional, and legal terms.

² Most of the young people who participated in this study were of Salvadoran ancestry, however one focal student was from Honduras and throughout the year, students of various Central American and Latin American backgrounds participated in class discussions. Therefore, for the purposes of inclusion, I alternate between Salvadoran/Central American, Salvadoran, D.C. Latino/a, or Latino/a depending on the specific group of students who are the focus of my analysis at any given moment.

- 1.) In what ways do young adult, Salvadoran/Central American migrants experience transnational processes in their day-to-day lives and personal biographies?
- 2.) How did the students who participated in this research call upon their experiences in their classroom-based literacy activities?
- 3.) How did the content, pedagogical, and meaning making practices of this transnational classroom intersect to bring about engaging moments for these youth and their teachers and what were the immediate social and academic consequences?

Through this dissertation study, I seek to understand how students' transnational experiences specifically got articulated in the context of academic texts in Spanish and English. The nature of this investigation also elucidates how at times students drew upon their transnational experiences to engage classroom-based literacy activities. Within this analysis, I also discuss how these youth engaged texts by, for example, identifying the political milieu of a novel's setting and then relating the novel's themes to their own lives. Thus I seek to understand how students historicized their lives, as they engaged academic literacy activities (see for example, Freire, 1970; 2000).

Through my study, I argue for a closer analysis of the social context of these young people's lives as a means of offering insights about a much broader set of students residing in cities throughout the nation and world experiencing similar transnational dynamics in their day-to-day lives. More specifically, I contextualize the experiences of Salvadorans residing in the D.C. metro area in terms of D.C. Latino/a communities and the U.S. Latino/a population broadly. In order to situate the present study about the

social context of Salvadoran/Central Americans, in the next section, I briefly discuss the larger educational context of most Latinos. These same students may not identify themselves as Latino/as per se, nevertheless, they will likely be identified as such in work and educational settings here in the U.S. (Oboler, 1995; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). And since on average Latino/a youth experience disparate educational and economic outcomes, it becomes important to understand the larger context of education encountered by many Salvadoran migrants.

Rationale for the Research

Many Salvadoran youth are situated within a larger Latino/a educational context where each year thousands of working class Latino/a youth embark on the path toward upward socioeconomic mobility in the United States, graduate from high school, continue on to college and eventually secure jobs earning well more than their parents. For these individuals the public school system mediates socioeconomic disadvantage and the illusion of the American Dream becomes a reality. And yet, for over a third of Latino/a students, this dream remains elusive as they leave school well before their high school graduation (Darder, 1997; Garcia, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Since educational attainment is of great consequence to the process of upward socioeconomic mobility, the implication of a high Latino/a drop out rate is that U.S. schools are not equitably preparing Latino/as to access further educational and economic opportunities. And while my study does not directly address the larger macro processes of upward socioeconomic mobility nor how youth get pushed out of school, the reason I seek to understand the social context of young people's lives is because youth (of every background) often draw upon their experiences to make sense of academic content. However, if that content is

presented without regard to the larger social context of students' lives, then they are not positioned to draw upon the breadth of their experience and may not fully engage in their academic experiences. Likewise, if there are no pathways for them to make these connections due to for example a curricula that is disconnected from their lives, and educators who are not prepared to teach in meaningful and responsive ways, schooling becomes alienating and that alienation may be one factor contributing to inequitable outcomes¹ for working class Latino/a students and their peers of African American and Asian descent.

These inequities are particularly problematic since within a generation, Latino/as are anticipated to comprise a quarter of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Therefore U.S. schools could potentially fail a sizeable percentage of their student body. With increasing rates of migration from diverse Latin American countries (NCES, 2003), the Latino/a population is also becoming more diverse and complex. During the 1980s and 1990s, migration rates from El Salvador and other Central American countries, have increased substantially resulting in a more than 300% increase in the Latino/a population in the District of Columbia. Latino/as presently comprise approximately 10% of the total population of the District (Cadaval, 1998; Pedersen, 2004; Repak, 1995; Rodriguez, 2002). These demographic shifts came about due to diminishing economic conditions and civil wars in Central America during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s coupled with a need for workers in the low wage service sector in Washington, D.C. (among other cities in the U.S.).

Given these shifting demographic and economic landscapes in combination with the status of Latino/a education, it becomes important to examine how schools might

mediate inequitable educational outcomes through specific educational practices. Developing engaging classroom contexts where students' day-to-day experiences are part of their classroom learning may be an important strategy for mediating these outcomes (see for example, Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, 2005). What is more, with rising rates of immigration to the United States, more accessible and affordable modes of transportation, electronic communication technology, and other globalizing forces, young Latino/as are able to live transnational lives in the United States in ways that past generations could not (see for example, Smith and Guarizo, 1998). Therefore, students' transnational experiences may be an important everyday resource for their lives with relevance for the ways they learn in school and out of school. Since Salvadorans/Central Americans are experiencing educational disadvantages more acutely in particular spaces like Washington, D.C., understanding the experiences they draw from to make sense of school texts and activities, including those that are transnational, may provide further insights into how to effectively mediate this disadvantage through academic engagement.

The youth who participated in this study led transnational lives as they, "...maintain[ed] material, affective, and symbolic connections to their homeland and produce[d] significant social networks, cultures, and identities in their new home-sites" (Rodriguez, 2005: 22). Living transnationally, then went beyond physically traversing national borders as part of their work and family life. It meant being rooted in multiple nation-states by sending remittances—that is, monetary funds to support family members in their ancestral countries. It meant engaging local social networks and resources with other immigrants to share information often necessary for survival. For the students who participated in my study, living transnationally also meant reading and writing in ways

that allowed them to maintain ties to their home countries and create new and complex understandings of what it meant to be Salvadoran residing in Washington, D.C.

Maintaining and creating these connections required strategic thinking, and these young people developed knowledge as they navigated borders—both physical and cultural—to establish themselves in Washington, D.C. However, even with the knowledge and experiences these students brought to the academic realm, they were not fluent in the language and discourses spoken in public institutions, were limited to working at the lowest levels of the labor market, and were therefore relegated to the margins of educational and economic structures. What is more, while they were able to leverage resources from Washington, D.C. to El Salvador through transnational circuits, they did not experience transnationalism on even terrain with fellow migrants with great economic and social resources at their disposal.

While past research about Central American communities in California during the 1980s has emphasized the successful educational experiences of students (Suarez-Orozco, M., 1989)³. The situation in Washington, D.C. appears distinct. More recent data from Washington, D.C. where the Latino population is primarily comprised of Salvadoran/Central Americans, indicate a less successful educational experience.

Although little, if any, research has been published about D.C. Latino/a students, test data

³ This work also discusses a small subset of youth in these communities who reside at the fringes of the educational system and are involved with local gangs. There certainly is contingent of youth affiliated with gangs in D.C., however to my knowledge the youth who participated in this project were not a part of such affiliations. What is more, Suarez-Orozco (1989) examines how the young Central Americans in his study tended to reside at extremes, either they were successful in school or completely marginalized. By contrast, I examine the experiences of youth who were engaged in school to the extent that they regularly attended and participated in class, however they were also struggling academically. Given recent migration trends these students might be more the norm than those who reside at either end of the educational success continuum.

from D.C. Public Schools (2001)⁴ indicate low achievement rates. Overall, 47% of D.C. public high school students scored “below basic” on a national standardized reading test. At the high school with the highest proportion of Latino/a students⁵ (64% in the 1999/2000 academic year) 58% scored below basic reading levels. These preliminary data suggest that D.C. students in general, and D.C. Latino/as in particular, are not adequately prepared to access academic and economic resources beyond high school.

This difference in educational experiences may, in part, be due to students’ educational levels prior to emigration. During the 1980s many Central American emigrants left for political reasons brought about by the civil wars in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua and included students, professionals and agricultural workers (see for example, Pedersen, 2004). This cohort of emigrants, along with their children, was more diverse in terms of socioeconomic and educational status than the present cohort who left for economic reasons (the details of which will be elaborated upon in Chapter 4). During the 1980s students may not have been proficient in English, yet a greater number of emigrants were fluent in academic discourses. Thus, in school they learned the English language by drawing upon an academic base established in El Salvador. Whereas, more recent migrants from rural communities in El Salvador⁶ with lower levels of formal education are charged with simultaneously learning English as well as academic ways of reading and writing. What is more, Central Americans arriving to California have done so within a larger Chicano-Latino/a context, whereas the District

⁴ Statistics are based on results from the Stanford 9 standardized test.

⁵ Achievement data from the charter school that was the focus of this study were not available at the time of data collection.

⁶ There are, of course, Central American migrants who continue to arrive to the United States as professionals and/or with comprehensive educational backgrounds (Cadaval, 1998; Repak, 1995), however they represent a small percentage of the community in Washington, D.C. and are not the focus of the present study.

of Columbia has a minimal educational infrastructure for meeting the needs of immigrant students. Although public education in California is far from an empowering experience for most Latino/as, there is a familiarity with various Latino/a communities and a history of programs designed to mediate inequalities within this particular population.

In the context of my study, most of the participants had elementary-level literacy skills, yet were astute thinkers as a result of negotiating the geographic and sociopolitical borders between El Salvador (and other Central American countries) and the United States. Thus in their language arts classes, their challenge was to acquire academic literacy abilities as they continued to develop their perspectives and analyses by reading and discussing academic texts.

Furthermore because of the ways these students were marginalized in the context of their day-to-day lives, along with many of their peers across Washington, D.C. and the United States, engaging them in academic content via their own experiences may be especially important. Therefore, this dissertation study focuses upon the connections between the transnational experiences of young people and their engagement in academic settings. Through this study, I illustrate how students drew upon their transnational experiences as resources, and often meaningfully engaged in their academic coursework.

In the next three chapters, I frame this study in terms of the research literature, my own research design and the local context of this study. I then move on to an analysis of my data and in the final chapter I present my conclusions. More specifically, in Chapter 2, I review research literature related to transnationalism and the context of education for many Salvadoran youth in the U.S. In Chapter 3, I present my research design including my methods of analysis for this dissertation study and corresponding questions. Through

Chapter 4, I offer an overview of the historical, sociological, transnational, and local context of this study. I present findings and analysis in Chapters 5 and 6. Finally, in Chapter 7, I offer conclusions for the study as I summarize the key findings, and discuss implications for research and practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter I review research literature related to the transnational and educational contexts of Salvadoran/Central American youth. I begin with a review of studies of transnationalism as they relate to the lives of research participants. In order to frame the educational context that many young Salvadoran migrants encounter in the United States, I review relevant research from the field of education. Throughout the chapter, I consider how the experiences of young Salvadoran migrants are situated within the constraints and possibilities of larger economic and educational structures and the sense of agency youth enact within and against these structures.

Transnational Migrants in Theoretical and Empirical Perspective

I draw from the work of sociologists and scholars of education to frame the construct of transnationalism. Using Smith and Guarnizo's (1998) concept of transnationalism "from above" versus "from below," I signal the distinction between powerful, transnational structures and their manifestations, versus the agentic processes people enact within their transnational lives. Thus, transnationalism "from above" refers to the back and forth movement of currency and individuals with institutional power engaged in the global marketplace. By contrast, transnationalism "from below" refers to the day-to-day practices that people enact to maintain emotional, political, and economic relationships with their countries of origin (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998). While, the

experiences of the youth who participated in my study were situated within larger global political and economic forces, as people without a great deal of institutional power, they often experienced transnationalism “from below.”

In her work, Rodriguez’ (2005) analyzes the cultural narratives of Salvadoran migrants, however she extends the research of Smith and Guarnizo (1998) with considerations of the *symbolic connections* and *identities* migrants establish within their transnational lives. Thus in her work *transnational* also refers to the ways individuals, “...maintain material, affective, and symbolic connections to their homeland and produce significant social networks, cultures, and identities in their new home-sites” (Rodriguez, 2005: 22).

What is more, through their varied transnational practices and enactments of identities, youth participated in a transnational social field. I draw from the work of Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1994) to define the term *transnational social field* as, “... the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement,” (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc, 1994:7). For example, through day-to-day acts such as phone calls, e-mails, monetary transactions, and reading Salvadoran news sources online, my research participants resided in one space, yet were in constant interaction with people and places from their countries of origin. It was due to these ongoing, multi-faceted activities with their relatives, friends, teachers, peers, and co-workers—that is, members of their social networks⁷ through out the Salvadoran diaspora that these youth participated in a transnational social field. What is more, as they engaged their

⁷ I use the term *social networks* to refer to the relationships that helped youth sustain their day-to-day lives (e.g. siblings, parents, teachers, co-workers, friends and peers).

transnational social networks, they also evolved their subjectivities by looking back and forth through space and time to situate themselves within the different spaces of their lives. As Basch and colleagues (1994) state, “Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states,” (p.7). For the youth who participated in this study, this often meant they situated their sense of self and made sense of their lives within their transnational social networks and practices. Thus, in my work, transnational also refers to the meanings people assigned to their experiences in one nation based on their personal histories in their home countries.

In Guerra’s work, transnational refers to, “a multidimensional, social space” (p. 9) constructed through back and forth migration patterns between a small ranch town in Mexico and Chicago and associated discursive practices enacted by members of this particular social network in both locales. In terms of education, he illustrates how members of this transnational social network created and sustained a sense of community through written and oral rhetorical strategies. However, unlike the participants in Guerra’s study, the participants in my study could not regularly traverse the physical borders between the U.S. and El Salvador due to immigration status and economic constraints. Nevertheless, Guerra’s research has important implications for my work and for the ways teachers might draw from the rhetorical strategies of im/migrant youth, informed by their transnational social networks, to teach literacy practices.

Through an analysis of the transnational lives of three Latinas of Mexican descent, residing in California, Sánchez (2007) asks, “What are students who are engaged global citizens already learning in their spheres beyond urban schools? And how can we

as educators learn from them?” (p. 490). Unlike my research participants, the girls in Sánchez’ study traversed back and forth between California and Mexico to visit relatives and spend vacations in their towns of ancestry. Thus their transnational understandings were renewed not only through modes of communication, but their physical presence in their country of origin. Sánchez was also able to travel back and forth with the girls on several occasions and thus observed their transitions in action. My work complements her study through an examination of the lives of youth who could not travel back and forth to their ancestral home and yet maintained transnational lives. I also build upon Sanchez’ work through an analysis of the transnational meaning-making practices of youth within school-based academic activities

The Role of Age and the Transnational Social Context of Migrants

Within the field of education, scholars have highlighted how young people are positioned distinctly from their elder relatives, due to the intersection of their transnational social contexts and their age (Guerra, 1998; Orellana, 2003; Orellana, Thorne, and Chee, 2001). For example, in his study about the transnational social networks and literacy practices of one *Mexicano* community in Chicago, Guerra found that the social networks of adults were largely comprised of family and co-workers who were also Spanish-dominant *Mexicanos*, if not Latino/as. By contrast members of younger generations had contact with a much more diverse array of peers, teachers, and co-workers, among other individuals. This means the transnational experiences of youth had multi-faceted layers informed by experiences with Latino/as who grew up in the U.S., non-Latino/a immigrants (who may or may not be citizens) and native born U.S. citizens.

Another way that young people experience transnationalism distinctly from their adult counterparts concerns their sense of family. For many youth, particularly those hailing from far away nations, living a transnational life means being separated from one's parents for years at a time. Among the consequences of this separation is a sense of loss for both parent and child and conflicts between them as they try and make up for lost time (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) also discuss the social mirroring that immigrant youth undergo as they come to see themselves in part, in terms of how the dominant "culture" views them. Given the pervasive anti-immigrant sentiment expressed in our present historical moment (see also Olsen, 1998; 2008), this reflection is often not a positive one. In their work, the Suarez-Orozco's examine how the idea that today's immigrants of color will not "melt" into the great American pot, impacts young people's sense of self and engagement with school or alienation from it. They discuss how unlike their parents, children look to the dominant culture as a point of reference. Young Central American migrants embody the immigrant paradox (see Garcia-Coll, 2009); according to Suarez-Orozco they by and large go on to four-year colleges at disproportionately high rates, regardless of their socioeconomic background, or at the other extreme, under-achieve and take up with gangs (see also Suarez-Orozco, M., 1989; Zhou and Bankston, 1998). In this dissertation study, I focus on older youth who were neither gang-involved, nor pursuing four-year college educations. Finally, as Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) frame their research, they identify two types of *transnational pathways*. *Target earners* migrate with the purpose of earning sufficient wages to return to their home country and live with a higher standard. *Sojourners* are migrant workers who emigrate with the intent of finding work

and have indefinite plans regarding returning to their home nation. However, through my research with the youth who participated in this study, I learned of another type of transnational - *Target earners* whose goal may be to stay or return in the long term, but in the short term they send remittances and over time send sufficient funds to bring family members and members of their social networks in their home countries to the United States. Most of my research participants were themselves this type of target earner and/or their parent fit this type.

For the remainder of this chapter, I move from the transnational context of young people's lives, to the broader social and educational context experienced by many Salvadoran youth in the United States.

Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives Related to Salvadoran Youth in the U.S.:

Framing Educational Inequality in Latino/a Communities

Salvadoran youth who migrate to the U.S. as children, or who are born here, are coming of age in a national, and often local, educational context where schools have disproportionately failed to prepare Latino/a youth for further opportunities (see for example Garcia, 2001). There are many perspectives related to why this failure occurs; in the following review of research I discuss structural, cultural, and sociocultural perspectives and illuminate some of the ideologies, structures, and practices shaping the context of education for Salvadorans/Central Americans in the United States.

Structural perspectives allow for an analysis of how schools are often organized to replicate socioeconomic inequities, however, this organization is ultimately carried out culturally by individuals. That is, through their practices and ways of being, teachers and students enact practices that bring about the structures and possibilities within schools.

Therefore, I also review how working class and/or Latino/a youth have been depicted through cultural frames within education research, as well as studies reflecting students' everyday lives and how they engage transnational structures through cultural practices. In this part of the review, I examine how working class and/or Latino/a students respond to school in ways that reproduce, contest, or navigate the educational terrains that are a part of their everyday lives. Finally, by way of situating the transnational experiences of Salvadoran and other Central American students as sources of knowledge, I also review how sociocultural research situates students' experiences as knowledge with relevance for classroom learning.

Situating Young Salvadoran Migrants within Structural Framings of US Schooling

Young Salvadoran migrants often experience their lives, including their education, as a tension between national and transnational structures and their own sense of agency, therefore, I draw from a structure-agency dialectic to help frame their experiences. Building from Giroux's conception of agency as, "the complex ways in which people mediate and respond to the interface between their own lived experience and structures of domination and constraint" (1983:119), I elucidate how youth mediate some of the institutional structures within their lives through transnational practices. As Sewell posits, "Structures, then, are sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by social action. But their reproduction is never automatic" (1992, p.19). In the lives of my research participants, these structures included, but were not limited to, the rules, practices, and resources that maintained social institutions, such as schools, families, immigration laws, and capitalist economic systems in the U.S. and El Salvador. In the case of this

dissertation study, youth encountered political structures through temporary immigration policies allowing them to reside in the U.S. and work, but only until a certain date and with limited civil rights. As relates to this study, the young adults who participated in this study experienced the tension between the structures of their lives – including the associated constraints and possibilities –versus the identities⁸ students enacted to reproduce, resist, take advantage of, and navigate within and in opposition to those structural constraints and possibilities.

Examining inequality in socioeconomic perspective.

As the majority of U.S. Salvadorans and other Central American youth reside in working class Latino/a neighborhoods and/or communities of color and attend under-resourced schools, it becomes important to understand the under performance of Salvadoran students in light of the relationship between the socioeconomic system and schooling for Latino/as and other working class students. For scholars employing a Marxist-structural framework, classrooms are reproductive sites where the relationships between teachers and students mirror the expected roles between worker and manager at different levels of the labor market (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Anyon, 1981; Oakes, 1985, 2005). For example, through tracking (Oakes, 1985) schools socialize students for the jobs appropriate to their class status (Bowles and Gintis. 1976). In this way middle class youth are prepared for higher education and corresponding high paying professional and managerial jobs and working class youth are prepared to assume lower paying manufacturing jobs, work in the trades, and low level service sector work (Anyon, 1981).

⁸ I use the plural, “identities” to signify the multiple ways students construct their sense of self in relation to the various contexts in their lives. Thus, a given student may describe herself as a young, Salvadoran, mother, who is growing up in Washington, D.C. and all of these facets of her experience comprise her identities.

These preparations occur through the differential practices enacted in predominantly working class Latino/a and African American schools versus predominantly white educational settings (see Delpit, 1995; Walsh, 1991). For example, reproductive education policies in the context of working class immigrants in the U.S. manifests as English classes and job training programs for immigrants, without attention to the critical thinking and academic ways of knowing needed for higher education. In other words, programs that train newcomers with the “skills” they will need to occupy the lower levels of the labor market with limited opportunities for upward socioeconomic mobility.

In sum, structural perspectives effectively present educational inequities in terms of race and socioeconomic class, and in doing so these scholars illustrate some of the ideologies and practices potentially leading to disparate outcomes for Salvadoran students. However, neither teachers nor students are positioned as having much agency within structural frameworks, rather they are passive cogs with little power to engage or change the larger dynamics within that system. Furthermore, discussion of students’ dispositions and capacities are characterized with broad strokes, as if all working-class students develop similar orientations.

My work departs from the scholarship discussed above as I recognize that within these macrostructures, some schools, through the work of teachers and their students have created supportive, critically engaging, and academically rigorous environments resulting in academic success among working class Latino/a students (see for example Gandara, 1995, 2009; Garcia, 2001; Solorzano, & Delgado Bernal, 2001). In keeping with this idea that the classroom is a productive site where students’ experiences are valued, I

situate this study about students' transnational experiences and contribute to related education research and practice.

Situating the Experiences of Salvadoran/Latino/a Youth through Cultural Perspectives

Research based on cultural perspectives make visible the sites of struggle, tension, or acquiescence working class and/or Latino/a students experience within and against social institutions. Therefore, cultural perspectives allow for a deeper examination of how people engage in ideological structures, including transnational economic structures, as social actors with a sense of agency. This research helps frame my study, as I analyze how young Salvadorans called upon their lived experiences, mediated by transnational forces and practices, and engaged in academic practices and content. In the pages that follow, I review how culture, defined in, by, and for Latino/a communities, mediates inequitable educational outcomes: in self-defeating ways, resistant yet reproductive ways, and transformative ways. While reviewing this work I also consider how students position themselves and are positioned within the cultural practices of schools, communities, and/or day-to-day life.

Situating the experiences of youth in terms of cultural deficits within Latino/a families.

I review cultural deficit perspectives, because all too often the experiences of Latino youth are framed within educational settings in terms of what they lack in their homes, family upbringing and cultural background. Cultural deficit perspectives presume that inequitable education outcomes among Latino/a youth occur due to a deficiency in their knowledge and cultural practices and those of their families. Such “deficit”

perspectives focus on working class communities and their lack of cultural resources (see for example Bourgois, 2003).

Understanding how cultural deficit thinking continues to operate in schools today, calls for a historical perspective on the concept. Gonzalez (2005) traces the roots of cultural deficit models to evolutionary theories prior to the 1900s where “culture” was situated as the creative ways separating humankind from nature. Following the work of anthropologist Franz Boas, she highlights how, by the 1900s biological models of race shifted and relied on culture to explain human differentiation. In this context, accounting for human difference in terms of culture instead of race was a step away from biological determinism, yet did not engage intersections between race and structural inequality (Gonzalez, 2005).

According to deficit perspectives, working class Latino/a children overwhelmingly under achieve in school because their families engage in a “culture of poverty” that does not provide adequate economic, social and cognitive resources for their children (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970; Lewis, 1966,1969). Instead of examining how policies and the underlying ideology of a stratified economic system brings about the challenges faced by working class people, social scientists examined the “culture” of “the poor,” (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This in turn led to policies aimed at intervening in the lives of low income families to enhance their cultural ways (e.g. parenting classes) versus identifying ways to increase their access to opportunities and/or income levels (e.g. higher paying jobs, health insurance, and policy advocacy) (see for example, Anyon, 2005). While some of the research I cite here is about 40 years old, these perspectives continue to influence the policies and practices within Latino/a educational communities.

Other research has analyzed and debunked the *culture of poverty* research through analysis of the structural and economic constraints faced by low-income families (Fraser, 1995; Rigdon, 1988; Valencia, 1997). Deficit frameworks are a limited way of conceiving the cultural experiences of youth because “culture” is only defined in terms of specific practices and sets of knowledge valued by the dominant culture. The absence of a structural analysis in much of this work results in justifying the larger inequities that schools facilitate. And yet, it remains important to understand the genesis of the *culture of poverty* concept due to its current manifestation as cultural deficit thinking among some educators in under-resourced schools where Latinos and African Americans are the majority (Bartolomae, 1998; Fine, 1991; Larson, 2003; Mercado, 2005; Zanger, 1994).

Within deficit frameworks, young people and their families experience life with a sense of agency—parents actively raise their children with cultural practices and values that do not prepare their children to engage school successfully. However, deficit frameworks do not account for the complex circumstances in individual’s lives. Nor do they consider the multiple ways families manage to support children and provide them with psychic, intellectual, emotional, cultural, and economic resources despite structural constraints.

By contrast, the research and analysis I present through my own dissertation research and fieldwork takes up the construct of culture in more complex ways allowing for an analysis of students’ experiences in terms of their multi-layered social context, including their experiences within a transnational social field. Within this more nuanced cultural perspective, youth experience culture in vibrant ways that are complex, in flux,

and sometimes enacted in negative ways. What is more, this cultural complexity is apparent in all cultural contexts, regardless of socioeconomic class, race, or ethnicity.

Situating the experiences of Latino/a youth in terms of resistance and consciousness

Other work considers how youth experience school through the cultural lens of resistance. This work helps to frame to my study by shifting the lens of analysis from how schools enact inequalities to how students navigate those inequalities. Within these studies, students experience school through far more agentic stances, however that agency is deployed distinctly depending on a range of factors, which I explore as follows.

Situating the experiences of Latino/a youth in terms of resistance.

In Learning to Labour, Willis (1977) argues that the working class students who participated in his research experienced school through their own cultural norms, versus those of the school, and thereby served to initiate themselves into the working class jobs they would eventually assume. Within his work, students' day-to-day experiences and ways of knowing served to counter the academic expectations of their teacher and the school. Willis opens a space for considering how young people call upon their experiences to navigate school, however since he frames these experiences in terms of their resistance, he does not imagine how schools and their classrooms may be productive sites or places where working class students acquire strategic academic tools to cultivate opportunities on their own behalf. Therefore, within his analysis Willis does not account for how students draw upon their experiences⁹, nor their awareness of inequality, in productive ways.

⁹ Willis shifts this perspective in his more recent work (see for example, Willis, 2003), which I discuss later in this chapter.

Similarly, Gibson and Ogbu (1991) extend explanations of educational inequality by examining race as well as social class in their discussion of student resistance. Their work discusses resistance in terms of students' perceptions of limited opportunities within racialized educational structures (Ogbu, 1991). In this work, students resist school knowledge—constructed by them as *white knowledge*—in order to preserve their identities as people of color. What is more, their recognition or consciousness of a racially stratified opportunity structure only validates their rejection of school and supports these students' perspective that academic success entails “acting white” and is thus damaging to their self-concept. Within Ogbu's Cultural Ecological Theory (see for example, Ogbu and Simons, 1998), Central Americans are situated as voluntary minorities—that is, people who immigrate to the U.S. in pursuit of further opportunities and who may well experience discrimination, but do not reject school knowledge because their home country is their frame of reference. According to this theory, young people enact dual identities in relation to school by rejecting prejudice or racism as true reflections of themselves. Instead they position themselves as residing in one sociogeographic location (the U.S.), yet of another place (Central America) where people (e.g. teachers, family members) view them in terms of their complexities. While I also argue that Central American youth develop a dual awareness—I situate this duality within the transnational social fields of their lives. What is more, while this duality has the potential to facilitate their school success, it does not inherently do so. In other words, the ability to resist internalizing mainstream stereotypes about ones' group is often not sufficient to bring about academic success due to the various challenges faced by teenage migrants. Other factors such as the context of their schooling, pressures to work and their

level of academic preparation in the U.S. and their home countries also mediate their potential to experience school success.

Within Ogbu's important work students experience school as active agents, aware of how racialized structural forces encumber their life chances. In the case of involuntary minorities (e.g. African Americans and Puerto Ricans), youth actively reject school-based knowledge because it opaquely their histories, whereas voluntary immigrant minorities embrace school knowledge despite its negation of their identities. However, like Willis, Ogbu's analysis does not account for how students connect their experiences, including their community-based knowledge, to successfully engage school.

By comparison, Moje and Martinez (2007) recast Gibson and Ogbu's understanding of resistance by illustrating how the Latino/a students who participated in their study rejected not necessarily academic discourses, but the idea of relinquishing community-based identities and precious connections to the elders in their lives. Thus, in this work students are conscious of race, yet do not racialize knowledge, rather they affirm their experiences with members of their social networks in addition to school knowledge. Within this work there are possibilities for students to be both conscious and successful students.

My work builds on much of the work in the previous section since students experienced their day-to-day realities within transnational social fields, at times in response to the structural inequalities within and between their countries of origin and reception. What is more, within the previously mentioned research, students are positioned as active social agents who recognize, versus internalize, how inequality operates in their lives. However, within their analyses of student resistance, these

scholars do not explicitly examine how students' consciousness of inequality may serve as a resource they call upon to navigate these structures in productive ways. Because I am ultimately interested in how schools may be engaging places for students through their lived experiences and ways of knowing, in this next section I review scholarship where students are discussed as productively bringing their experiences to the academic realm.

Situating the experiences of Latino/a youth in terms of consciousness.

Following the work of Freire (1970), I define consciousness as, an awareness of and the capacity to name how inequality operates in one's life. The research in this next section presents student consciousness as a facet of their lived experience, enacted in ways that enable them to successfully navigate school. These scholars then open a space for considering not only how inequality operates in students' lives, but how they maneuver within these inequities in agentic and productive ways. In doing so, these scholars also offer a sense of possibility for changing educational structures via human action. Willis' more recent work (2003, 2004) speaks to the importance of learning from students' experiences as follows:

Educators and researchers should utilize the cultural experiences and embedded bodily knowledge of their students as starting points, not for bemoaning the failures and inadequacies of their charges, but to render more conscious for them what is unconsciously rendered in their cultural practices. The experiences and knowledge of the students – foot soldiers of modernity – can help us, and them, to understand their own place and formation within flows of cultural modernization.

(p. 280)

For young-adults who situate their lives within a transnational social field, this means coming to understand how they experience for example, border crossings and the process of navigating a new local/national space. What is more, this process of rendering, “...more conscious for them what is unconsciously rendered in their cultural practices” implies working with students to bring about an awareness of their own social class positioning within the various contexts of their lives, including the regional contexts. With this awareness, they might resist the practices of uneven social structures and not reproduce their own class status, as was the case for the youth of Willis’ earlier work (1977). Furthermore, it may be that another element of mediating educational inequities for working class/Latino/a youth entails supporting their sense of collective consciousness, through for example, the texts they read in school and encouraging them to question relations of power in historical perspective as well as their own lives.

As one example, Moje, E.B., McIntosh Ciechanowski, K., Kramer, K., Ellis, L. Carrillo, R. and Collazo, T. (2004) discuss the struggles Latino/a students of Mexican, Puerto Rican and Dominican descent faced as they reconciled “dominant” discourses with their own discourses in terms of “a splintering of identity, selfhood, or consciousness.” Drawing from the work of Bhabha (1994), they argue that this splintering may be productive as it is in these contested spaces that, “newness enters the world” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 212). Therefore, departing from the work of Ogbu and others, Moje and colleagues imagine the possibility of academically rigorous and engaging classroom contexts where students bring their experiences to bear on academic content in productive ways.

O'Connor (1997; 1999) also extends and in many ways departs from most of the aforementioned scholars who analyze student resistance in terms of their own reproduction (Anyon, 1981; Fine, 1991; Gibson and Ogbu, 1991; Ogbu, 1991, 1998; Willis, 1977). In her work, O'Connor (1997; 1999) illustrates how a group of working class African American students called upon their consciousness to navigate school-related obstacles. She describes resilient students' consciousness as a resource they bring to their academic endeavors, "In short, the resilient youths seemed to have received distinct messages (via the actions and ideologies of their significant others) which conveyed that oppression and injustice can be actively resisted and need not be interpreted as a given," (O'Connor, 1997, p. 621). She refers to students' "co-narratives" as the ways they construct the individualistic U.S. achievement ideology—hard work and perseverance leads to educational success and attainment—along side an awareness of how factors such as race and class may constrain the potential opportunities available to them. O'Connor notes how students' co-narratives reflect their "critical consciousness" and become a strategy and inspiration for navigating on their own behalf amidst structural obstacles. My study builds upon this work by examining how the cultural narratives in young peoples' lives, as one example of their transnational experiences and ways of knowing (Heath, 1983), become a resource they drew upon when navigating academic contexts.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire writes about the purpose of education to bring about *conscientização*, or critical consciousness. The students he worked with could not read or write and Freire identified them as 'oppressed'. He

describes how they came into literacy and consciousness within a dialogic process with their teachers as follows:

No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their own redemption (Freire, 1970:36).

Following Freire's philosophy, students and teachers are positioned as social agents who work together to draw from students' experiences to engage them in the processes of literacy. In this way, people enact the agency to, "simultaneously create history and become historical-social beings,"(Freire, 1970, p. 82). Thus Freire argues that education cannot be productive unless students learn in contexts where they may historicize and make meaning of their everyday lives. However, he does not explicitly illustrate how students voice their experiences within educational contexts.

Thus researchers who present students as conscious of inequality, yet navigating school successfully in light of this awareness, open a further space to consider how consciousness might actually be a resource for students within school. This work, especially that of Freire, sets the stage for drawing upon students' experiences, including their transnational experiences within school settings, as part of their academic process. However, it is less clear from this research how students' day-to-day interactions, oral traditions, and belief systems might become part of their educational process. By comparison, the following discussion of *cultural difference* research allows for consideration of how students' day-to-day experiences, informed by local community-

based cultures with long-standing histories and beliefs may be integral to successfully engaging them in academic practices.

Situating Latino/a students in terms of cultural difference research

Cultural difference models shift explanations about the underperformance of working class students to consider the cultures of students and their families. In doing so, cultural difference research explores the potential for actively bringing culture into the classroom context. For example, Philips' (1982) study of a class within a Native American community in Warm Springs, Oregon found that initially teachers thought their Native students were unresponsive and lacked cooperation. By contrast, she also found that in their home and community settings students were in fact talkative and actively engaged, however only during times deemed appropriate for talkative activity. Therefore, what teachers interpreted as disengagement and resistance was actually respectful behavior in the students' home settings. As the teachers learned to create culturally appropriate contexts for "talk" students became more engaged in the new classroom routines.

Thus within cultural difference research, the cultural experiences of students have value and worth that educators may consider when teaching them. Studies premised on the ideas of cultural difference call for actively bringing culture into the classroom context. This perspective values the experiences of marginalized groups, yet often backgrounds the role of power relationships in students' everyday lives and between students and teachers. The implication of Philips (1982) work for my study is that teachers need to understand their students in terms of their cultural context in order to effectively teach them. Yet, this work does not fully acknowledge the larger

sociopolitical structures embedded in schools and particularly between teachers and students.

The research presented in this next section explores the potential for mediating structural inequalities in terms of students' experiences, and cultural and literacy practices students bring to the academic setting.

Situating Salvadoran Youth within the Education Context of U.S. Latinos:

Classroom Practices and Research

Drawing on students' knowledge and experiences in order to teach them is not a new concept. In 1916, Dewey elaborated on the connections between student experience and education as follows, "...one has to assimilate, imaginatively, something of another's experience in order to tell him intelligently of one's own experience" (p.6). He goes on to define the role of schools, "to transmit all the resources and achievements of a complex society" (Dewey, 1916, p. 8). Thus, the process of educators effectively "tell[ing]" their students of their own experiences—be it specific practices within a given content area (e.g. how to develop an outline), subject area content, or academic discourses in general—entails coming to understand their students' in terms of their day-to-day experiences. Dewey did not write in terms of culture or larger issues of equity, however the idea of understanding the experiences of one's students in order to effectively teach them has important implications for my study.

What makes my work and the research cited in this next section distinct—from Dewey among others—is the premise that students from *all* socioeconomic, cultural, and racial backgrounds have day-to-day experiences outside of formal schooling with value and worth for classroom-based teaching and learning. In this next section, I discuss

research exploring how the experiences of working class/Latino students comprise and reflect larger familial and community contexts. Following Paulo Freire, this work emphasizes coming to know the experiences of working class (“oppressed”) peoples as a vital aspect of classroom pedagogy.

Knowledge in the context Latino/a students’ lives: Funds of knowledge.

The *funds of knowledge* approach to research and teaching situates Latino/a youth by using intellectual tools of the academy—ethnographic methods employed reflexively by university-based researchers and classroom-based teachers—to reflect and analyze the strengths and complexities of Latino/a youth and their families (Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, 2005; Gonzalez, 2005; Mercado, 1997; Moje, et. al. 2004; Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg, 1992). *Funds* researchers seek to understand the lives of Latino/a youth and their families in order to create more engaging pedagogies that bring about greater potential for academic success and educational attainment for youth. *Funds of knowledge* are comprised of the social networks of youth, including their day-to-day experiences and practices, and the embedded knowledge they glean from this social context (Gonzalez and Moll, 2002; Moll, 1992; Moll and Greenberg, 1990; Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg, 1992). By situating students everyday experiences as part of complex networks and activities, coming to know one’s students entails coming to know their individual interests, as well as the larger social context of their lives in terms of their ways of knowing and bodies of information this context facilitates for youth. Thus, in practice, *funds* researchers and teachers:

...draw on Latino community knowledge as a way of, ‘presenting, sharing, and negotiating the knowledge—both canonical and procedural—that will be expected

of students in their school careers and imagine new social roles and economic scripts. (Gonzalez and Moll, 2002, p. 638)

In this work young people and their families are positioned as social actors who are knowledgeable. A *funds of knowledge* framework calls for a classroom context where students' experiences are called upon and interwoven with academic content. In this way learning not only becomes meaningful in terms of students' everyday experiences, but being academic does not entail rejecting or bifurcating facets of oneself into for example, a school self and a home self (Flores-González, 2002; Phelan, 1998).

The meaning of *funds of knowledge* and the nature of associated research has evolved over time, but the work grew from a structural-economic and historical analysis of U.S. Mexican "identity" in the southwest United States. Spanning the 20th century, this research focused on changing immigration policies and a changing labor market due to industrialization and the rise of U.S. capitalism in the region currently known as the Arizona: Mexico borderlands (Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg, 1984, 1990,1992). For example, in the 1930s the rise of industrialization along with policies aimed at reifying the U.S.: Mexican border, pushed families to diversify their skills beyond agriculture to, for example, mechanical expertise that would lead to employment in the formal, industrialized labor market. Related policies enforcing immigration status resulted in bi-national or transnational familial social networks, among relatives that had formally crossed the border region with ease. *Funds of knowledge* scholars consider the knowledge children acquire as a result of their community social networks. This work often elucidates the diverse knowledge and skills children learn from their parents' ties to domestic, informal and formal labor markets and practices (Mercado, 1997; Moll, 1992;

Moll and Greenberg, 1992; Vélez-Ibáñez and Greenberg, 1992). While the *funds* work originated as a study of transnational social networks and continues to explore how youth live globally, it does not consider the specific sociopolitical context of Salvadoran/Central American youth, nor how youth draw upon transnational social fields to engage school texts.

Mercado's research extends much of the funds of knowledge work beyond rural communities in the southwest by employing a historical-structural analysis of the day-to-day language and literacy practices of Puerto Rican families in the urban context of New York City. Mercado's research contributes to the *funds* discussion by noting the importance of geographical space as an important facet of students' experiences. For example, New York City, as a place where different groups come into physical contact with each other by walking down crowded streets and riding public transportation, provides a different context for young people to develop their funds of knowledge than rural agricultural regions of Moll and Gonzalez and colleagues. Salvadoran youth residing in the DC area, often cultivated and drew from their funds of knowledge within the transnational context of their lives, which was often informed by the rural and urban spaces of their home neighborhoods in contrast to the national-urban spaces of Washington, D.C.

Among Mercado's findings were that caregivers (e.g. parents) led transnational lives as they read global texts such as novels from Mexico, magazines from Brazil, newspapers from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, a magazine called "Americas," as well as watching telenovelas as another type of literacy practice. She also found that participants engaged in literacy activities to respond to their everyday needs

particularly around themes of: health and nutrition, the role of school in keeping children safe from the streets, legal issues affecting household members, and the need for “spiritual comfort and guidance”.

While Mercado discusses how New York City and its urban context emerges in students’ literacy practices, my work builds upon her research by illustrating, in explicit ways, how factors such as the local economy, the civil war in El Salvador, the economic history of El Salvador, the history of Salvadoran communities in Washington, D.C., and the history of economic and political ties between El Salvador and D.C. (Pedersen, 2004) influence the knowledge youth draw from their *funds*.

Another limitation of much of the funds research has been its focus on the household as a unit of analysis. When considering teenagers, particularly teenagers who live transnational lives, their social networks often extend beyond the home front (Guerra, 1997; Moje, et. al., 2004) and into the community in the form of interactions with co-workers and friends in various locales.

Moje and her colleagues (2004), extend the *funds* research by situating their work in an urban, mid-western setting with a focus on adolescents’ everyday literacy and discursive practices. Here *funds of knowledge* refer to networks of relationships, “such as homes, peer groups, and other systems and networks of relationships that shape the oral and written texts young people make meaning of and produce as they move from classroom to classroom and from home to peer group, to school, or to community.” Moje et. al. (2004) found that adolescents’ *funds of knowledge* are influenced by peer groups and popular culture in addition to family and community. Another important finding of this work, as it relates to my study, is that students’ funds of knowledge reflected their

experiences living in a “globalized world” through travel, reading transnational texts, and engaging Spanish-language media (see Sánchez (2007) for a further discussion of the transnational funds of knowledge of Mexican origin youth). While the Salvadoran/Central American youth who participated in my study, as well as many of their peers in Washington, D.C., physically traversed the border only once, they continued to draw from their transnational funds of knowledge by e-mailing home communities in El Salvador (and other countries) and by calling upon members of their local social networks to confront the barriers of adjusting to the urban environment of Washington, D.C.

Thus *funds of knowledge* frameworks counter deficit models by re-positioning working class students and families as social actors with valuable knowledge. Gonzalez explicates as follows:

More importantly, the funds of knowledge of a community occupy that space between structure and agency, between the received historical circumstances of a group, and the infinite variations that social agents are able to negotiate within a structure. (Gonzalez, 2005, p. 43)

Funds of knowledge, therefore allow for culture to be situated as the everyday practices of Latino/a families, including but not limited to their experiences as workers (Gonzalez et.al., 2005). Cultural narratives such as legends and song lyrics exemplify one form of knowledge that my research participants drew from their funds. As oral and written narratives are types of texts that could inform the reading and writing young people do in school, in this next section I discuss the intersection between the social context of young people in terms of literacy practices

Knowledge, literacy and context in the transnational lives of youth.

For this dissertation study I use the term *literacy* to refer to an interactive process between a reader or writer and their text. Literacy then, goes beyond simply decoding and encoding print, and also includes the ways young people call upon their own experiences to make meaning of the written word, and use words to convey their own meanings. What is more, the context of our lives—that is, the places, cultural practices, family history, languages, and other factors, that frame who we are, our world views and how we interpret day-to-day events, also influence how we make meaning of texts. Likewise, for the young people who participated in my study, the transnational context of their lives impacted how they made sense of the various texts in their lives. Moje, Dillon, and O'Brien (2000) explicate this relationship between texts, contexts, and readers as follows:

The ideas that literacy is a dynamic process, involving an interaction or transaction between a learner and a text situated in a particular context, has framed much of the research on reading and writing at the secondary level—Grades 7 through 12—over the last 30 years (p. 165).

In the context of my study, I observed literacy as a dynamic process between readers, various texts, and their experiences within a particular transnational context. Some of these texts were the tools that helped them to maintain transnational relationships (e.g. emailing and posting chat room messages within a global sphere), whereas it was through engaging other texts (e.g. novels about El Salvador) that they voiced their transnational orientations and personal histories. Teaching with an attention to context means that students like my research participants - young-adults who led complex lives, and participated in global economic and communication practices – are afforded opportunities

to bring those practices to bear on the learning they do in school. A purely cognitive approach with a focus on decoding would not allow for these types of connections and consequent meaning making.

Also important to meaning making are the identities within the various contexts of our lives (Moje, et. al., 2000). That is, our identities influence how we come to understand a given piece of writing.

The constructs of identity/ies and subjectivity/ies are important in literacy and language research because the ways young people use literacy and language can influence how they are positioned as well as their access to further literacy and language learning. Subject positions are influenced by context(s) (Moje, et. al., 2000, p. 166).

In the context of this dissertation study, young adults were situated in terms of multiple, overlapping identities. For example, they were positioned as students, workers, peers, brothers/sisters, daughters, fathers, mothers, Salvadorans, Latinos, and Hispanics (among other markers). Within each of these identity markers they negotiated power relations, usually with limited power vis-a-vis others in a given context. As students they ultimately deferred to their teachers and school administrators, as daughters and sons they deferred to their parents, as workers they deferred to their bosses. Likewise as “Hispanics” they experienced hyper visibility as racialized immigrants who are positioned as “the problem” along many axes (e.g. education, absorbing government resources, healthcare), and simultaneous invisibility due to limited opportunities to voice their actual reality. Thus, they often experienced power as a sense of invisibility within a larger powerful,

national, city space. Their experiences given these different identities, in turn influenced how they interpreted particular texts.

Related to the triadic relationship between text, context, and meaning making are the ways young people bring together different texts from their lives - oral, written and imagined -to make connections, convey meanings, and/or issue critiques. Thus, I draw from the work of Bloome and Egan-Robertson to consider about how students created *intertextual* connections and juxtapositions between their school-based texts and their own narratives. Bloome and Egan-Robertson frame intertextuality as, "...a social construction, located in the social interactions that people have with each other. What is more, they note that, "...juxtaposing texts, at whatever level (by writer, reader, or researcher), is not in itself sufficient to establish intertextuality. A juxtaposition must be proposed, be interactionally recognized, be acknowledged, and have social significance," (Bloome and Egan-Robertson, 1993:308).

The concept of intertextuality (Bloome and Egan-Robertson, 1993; Egan-Roberson, 1998) also helped me describe how students' wove their narratives (both oral and written) and lived experiences together with the written texts of their classes and the narratives of their peers. Therefore, I call upon this work to illustrate how students and their teachers brought together their experiences, including their day-to-day narratives and school-based texts through intertextual maneuvers situated within their larger transnational social contexts. Since these youth often brought their transnational experiences-including their cultural narratives-to their interpretations of classroom texts and literacy practices, within particular classroom dynamics, I also draw from research that analyzes the cultural hybridity within educational settings.

Transnational contexts within hybrid classroom spaces.

Following the work of several scholars of literacy (Gutierrez, K. D., Baqueando-Lopez, P., Alvarez, H. & Chiu, M.M. et. al., 1995; and Moje, et. al., 2004), I use Soja's *Thirdspace* to describe how students and teachers created hybrid conversational spaces as they engaged written texts and offered their opinions, memories, and reflections in dynamic exchanges. Thirdspace has been conceptualized as a bridge between everyday and academic discourses, a "navigational space" with the potential to lead to fluency in academic discourses, and finally as a space of change and new knowledge (Moje, et.al., 2004). While the construct of hybrid social spaces – are multi-faceted, Soja begins to delineate Thirdspace as he describes an exhibition space in Los Angeles as follows:

Everything is seen as simultaneously historical-social-spatial palimpsest, Thirdspace sites in which inextricably intertwined temporal, social, and spatial relations are being constantly reinscribed, erased and reinscribed again. (Soja, 1996: 18).

In the context of the present study, my research participants literally wrote, erased, re-wrote and then voiced their thoughts in, for example, their journals and class discussions as they were making sense of the English language, academic discourses, and their own evolving ideas within the transnational spatial, historical, and social milieu of their day-to-day lives. Soja continues as follows:

If Firstspace is explored primarily through its readable texts, contexts, and Secondspace through its prevailing representational discourses, then the exploration of Thirdspace must be additionally guided by some form of potentially emancipatory praxis, the translation of knowledge into action in a

conscious-and consciously spatial-effort to improve the world in some significant way. (Soja, 1996: 22)

In education research, the distinction between First and Secondspace varies with Firstspace being the official classroom script—that is, the texts students read in class and the classroom discourse initiated by their teachers and Secondspace as the meanings students assign to these texts based on their own lives (Gutierrez, 1999). More recently, Moje et. al. (2004) reverse the construct of First and Secondspace to give primacy to the funds of knowledge and discourses that comprise students’ day-to-day lives, while also noting that everyday and academic discourses are not inherently disaggregated spaces. Thirdspace then encompasses the moments when these “spaces” intersect, come together or clash against each other (Gutierrez, et. al., 1999; Moje, et.al., 2004). In the context of the present study, those physical spaces where one grows up, the literal and metaphorical borders one crosses as a child become the primary sources of knowledge for their lives, and the construct of Thirdspace provides a way to analyze what happens in classroom conversational spaces as well as how such spaces get constructed through the spatial, historical, and social positioning of teachers and students within larger transnational social fields. Therefore more important to my study than the designation of first versus second space is how student and institutional discourses intertwine in hybrid ways to produce engaging and thought provoking discussions for students.

Finally, hybrid or Thirdspace could be a useful way to frame how *all* young people bring their day-to-day experiences into conversation with their teachers, peers, and academic texts, however, since the students and teachers in the classroom context of this study often engaged texts by presenting memories and perspectives based on their

spatial, historical, and social positioning in-between the countries that framed their lived experiences, the construct of Thirdspace may be particularly useful here. Thus to recap the above terms: I use *transnational* to elucidate a vital dynamic in students' day-to-day lives, *intertextual* as the ways students intersected the texts of their lives and their school-based texts, and *hybrid spaces* as those classroom moments where students and teachers produced these intersections together.

Conclusion

In sum, the structural, cultural, funds of knowledge, cultural studies, and literacy scholarship that I cite within this literature review, frames my research as I either build upon it or actively depart from it. It is ultimately within the transnational structures of school, work, community, and family that the youth who participated in this study experienced their lives. Through cultural practices within and in-between multiple national contexts they navigated, reproduced, and created new possibilities for themselves in terms of their futures and their world views.

In Chapter 3, I move to a methodological discussion of my own work and how I designed my study to address my research questions and contribute to the larger body of work presented in this current chapter

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Overview

I employed a qualitative research design in an alternative high school in Washington, D.C. to further understand how Latino/a adolescents—particularly Salvadoran/Central American youth—called upon their day-to-day experiences and narratives to make meaning in an academic context. Towards this end, I observed one set of students (8 focal students) in their English and Spanish literacy classes 3 days per week over the course of 12 months. I also attended fieldtrips, occasional weekend outings, and in-school parties with students and engaged in periodic informal conversations with them while running errands in the neighborhood by the school.

Site Selection

In the summer of 2000, I first approached the director of the *New Beginnings Charter School*¹⁰ to discuss my research interests and the potential of engaging in a participant observation study. Having lived and/or worked in Latino/a communities in Rhode Island, California, and Michigan, I was interested in learning more about the new and growing Central American communities in the Mid-Atlantic region including Washington, D.C. The *New Beginnings* director approved my entrée to the research site and in September, I was introduced to Nathaniel, one of the focal teachers and the students in his level 3 English class. We met to discuss the possibility of my observing

¹⁰ Pseudonym

his class at the conclusion of that meeting he welcomed me to conduct my research with him and his class.

Researcher Identity and Positionality

My Puerto Rican ancestry facilitated initial acceptance from the students at the onset of the project. They saw me as a Latina and referred to this part of my identity periodically. For example, when a guest speaker came to their class, he started the discussion with the following:

<p>Speaker: ¿De donde son Ustedes?</p> <p>Several of the students say El Salvador.</p> <p>Luis says, “Todas las mujeres...y una puertorriqueña.”</p> <p>Sol affirms, “Boricua.”</p> <p>(I nod)</p> <p>(Fieldnotes, 3.27.01)</p>	<p>Speaker: Where are you all from?</p> <p>Several of the students say El Salvador.</p> <p>Luis says, “All of the women...and one Puerto Rican.”</p> <p>Sol affirms, “Boricua¹¹”</p> <p>(I nod)</p>
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However they also referred to me as, “Americana” at times. I attributed this label to my U.S. citizenship, fluency in English, and that I grew up in the United States. They alternated between speaking to me in English and Spanish depending on the context and content of the conversation. However, my fluency in English, adult status, and level of education, may have created social distance and in turn caused them to view me as an authority figure at times. Most of the students addressed me with the formal, “Usted.” However, I believe my lack of fluency in Spanish—I am proficient and pronounce words with a Spanish accent, but often make grammatical errors, served to lessen the extent of this distance. My errors prompted gleeful laughter from the students many a time. These

¹¹ *Boricua* is a colloquial term used to refer to Puerto Ricans, usually said with affection. Prior the Spanish conquest the island currently known as Puerto Rico was called, Borinquen.

moments, though humbling, were important because they made me vulnerable to them and shifted the knowledge pendulum in their favor. These interactions also served as a personal reminder of their struggles with language everyday.

Thus I was both an insider and outsider in this setting. For example, during the course of one day, one of the students walked into class saying, “that f- -ing...” stopped when she saw me, and continued, “Oh sorry Tehani, no te vi” (I didn’t see you). At *New Beginnings*, the students were encouraged to refer to their teachers by their first names, however her apology signaled that she saw me as an adult and that swearing in front of me was inappropriate. Yet, in her next class she showed me a rash on her hand and said it was because she drank Margaritas last night (a topic not usually discussed with one’s teacher). I said, “Tequila can be strong. Be careful, it can also give you a terrible hang over.” She continued to talk to me about another time she broke out because she drank too much tequila. Thus, I tried to relate to students when I could, and refrained from judgment. Often these youth, especially the girls, would approach me before class to chat with me about their weekends or ask me questions about my life. The boys, Luis in particular, at times engaged me in discussions about current events and/or politics.

The young people who participated in this work also periodically asked me why I was taking so many notes or how I would use the information. At these times I replied that I was writing a “book” for a school project and I was using the information for this project. Sometimes I explained that there was not very much written about Salvadorans or Central Americans and I thought it was important that people, especially teachers knew about some of their experiences so that they could teach them better.

I present these various examples of my own positionality within my research site because they speak to my facility as a researcher in this setting. Since I was interested in students' day-to-day experiences, as well as how they expressed their sense of identity and culture, it was critical that they felt comfortable with me and free to speak with me in their native language about a range of topics. At the same time, my outsider status allowed me to observe aspects of their lives and how they expressed the meanings they attributed to everyday events that I might not "see" if I was too close to their ways of interacting and took much of their discourse for granted.

Reflexivity and ethics

As I prepared to enter this setting it was clear to me that I had the potential to gain a great deal. I anticipated that the students and their teachers would generously share their ideas and feelings with me in ways that would form the basis of my dissertation study and eventually a book or published articles that would further my career as a community based educator and researcher. As a community based educator and researcher, it was very important to engage this setting ethically and by continuously thinking about and questioning my own positions within this setting. That is, I continuously engaged in a reflexive process as I collected, analyzed, and wrote up my data. Thus it was important to me to not merely collect data from this setting, but also to be open to their needs and concerns, and call upon my own educational background to support them when I could. Soon into the data collection, I realized that the relationships I would establish in this setting had the potential to continue on after the formal data collection ended. Throughout data collection, when students asked for my help with job applications, resumes, studying for tests, and learning algebra, I set up times to meet with them outside of school. These

interactions offered me further insights into their lives, but when I met with them at their request, supporting their efforts was my primary concern.

Throughout this project, I struggled with how to facilitate student understanding of the very process for which they offered their consent and participation. As I stated earlier, at times I would say I was writing a book about their experiences explaining that it was important that teachers understood the experience of Salvadorans especially since more and more Salvadorans were coming to the United States. I wanted them to understand what I was doing in their class and for them to be active research participants rather than passive subjects. I imagined that the focal students had probably never read an ethnography or research study. They were also intellectual and critical thinkers in their own right, though not versed in the discourse of research methodology. Therefore, during one class session we read and discussed several vignettes presented in Guadalupe Valdes' *Con Respeto* (1996) as examples of how I might write about what I learned from the time I spent with them. I choose the work of Valdes because the vignettes were written using vocabulary and a discourse that I thought would be accessible to the students. In this way, I attempted to offer a sense of how the words and knowledge of local Latino/a communities become a part of academic texts.

Methodology

Data collection

Participant observation and role of the researcher.

As a participant observer in this setting, I collected data in students' English and Spanish classes, 3-4 days a week over an 11 month time period; as such my role vacillated between co-teacher, tutor, mentor and note taker. My specific role as

researcher was made explicit to the students as I explained the project at different points throughout the school year, showed them examples of published ethnographies, and openly took copious notes in their presence.

I decided to sit in on their Spanish class as an opportunity to interact with them and observe their discussions around text in their native language. Because they were more at ease communicating in Spanish, I thought I might gain more detailed insights about their life and experiences with text. While the students were fluent Spanish speakers, due to factors such as sporadic school attendance in El Salvador, most of the students struggled to read and express themselves through the written word in Spanish. Initially, I had planned to simply observe classroom interactions, however I was often pulled into their discussions either because their teacher asked for my opinion or because the students wanted to hear me read aloud. At times they were surprised by how much Spanish I knew, yet also took pleasure in correcting me when I made pronunciation errors.

My role in these classes had several components. When their teacher was teaching, I would sit and take notes. My note-taking in both classes was often interrupted by the students as they called me over and asked for my help. At these times, I put my notes aside and worked with them one-on-one. At times I would circle the class and ask students who were chatting or seemed at an impasse if they needed help. I learned as much from helping the students articulate their thoughts via the written word as I did from observing their class discussions and side conversations in English and Spanish. In this way, I also positioned myself in this setting in multiple ways – at times as a knowledgeable other who was there to help them and at times as a member of their class

who took a lot of notes and participated in class discussions. These different types of interactions allowed me to learn details about the students' lives, their opinions, and interests.

Fieldnotes.

During each class session I jotted down notes in a lined notebook (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2002). My notetaking practice became so much a part of the patterns of this class that one day I was tired, paused, put my pen down for a few moments and rested my hand. Diana glanced over at me and asked me if I wanted her to write for me (Fieldnotes, 3.27.2001). I always kept my notes open and visible to students, if they were curious, as they sometimes were, I slid the book over to them so they could read what I had written. This was yet another strategy I employed to make my research process transparent.

As I jotted down notes, I paid particular attention to when youth spoke about activities they did outside of school and their views of current events. These events included, among many other topics, the 2000 presidential elections, recent changes in immigration law, and their opinions related to worldwide events, the 2001 earthquake in El Salvador being an important example. I was also very interested in moments when they referred to how they used literacy and text in their day-to-day lives. Before and after class, students sometimes used the computers in Nathaniel's class to check their e-mail and/or surf the web. During these times, I engaged them in conversation and asked about their interests in the given websites and noted the website addresses in my notes.

I also sketched the images, diagrams, and words Nate and Ernesto wrote on the board in my notebook as I jotted down their oral directions to the class (see Appendix A for examples of the anticipated classroom observation foci). As I worked to understand

the connections between students' experiences and their academic engagement within this class, I analyzed these sketches within my fieldnotes along with worksheets, project assignments, and readings. Finally, after each session in the field I expanded my jottings into detailed, coherent notes. Periodically, I wrote preliminary analytical memos (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Glazer, 1978; Miles and Huberman, 1994) noting particular themes I was observing at the time along with my own questions about those themes or classroom dynamics. I also kept a researcher journal (see for example Strauss and Corbin, 1998) where I documented more personal thoughts and feelings about the fieldwork and my reactions to the students' lives and struggles. The journal was a tool I used to separate my feelings and gut reactions at the field site from my descriptive notes. Of course there was overlap at times.

In an effort to capture the students' oral discourse verbatim, I initially planned to audio record selected small group interactions in this class. However, as I learned about the students' uncertain immigration status I became hesitant. No young person or teacher ever indicated that any one person at this research site did not possess legal immigration documents. However, the topic of documentation often arose among teachers and students. What is more, the one time I did attempt to explain audio recording as part of my project and record a conversation between José and Milagros about a class assignment, José became quiet and Milagros blushed, shook her head and said, "Yo no se, yo no se..." [*I don't know, I don't know...*]. Given Milagros' apparent discomfort, José's silence and a larger context where I sensed students' vulnerability due to their immigration status, I decided to rely on fieldnotes, interviews, and written artifacts as my data sources. This was both an ethical and methodological decision. Ultimately their

classroom was their learning space and I did not want my project to make them feel uncomfortable in this important space in their lives. As an ethnographer, I also wanted them to feel at ease to convey their thoughts, ideas, life stories, and insights. Given their reactions to the tape recorder in their class setting, I anticipated this device would constrain the depth of experience they were willing to reveal when I was around. Therefore what I may have lost in terms of precise wording, I hope I gained in terms of ethical and in-depth research practices. I was, however, able to record one-on-one interviews with students. This was a different context where I was able to respond to youth's questions or concerns within a one-on-one private exchange. I also started the interview by letting each participant know that if they felt uncomfortable with a given question, it was not necessary for them to respond. Also, by the time I conducted the interviews with the students in the spring and summer of 2001, I had the chance to develop rapport with them over the course of six months or more. I believe this rapport and the related trust and comfort they felt with me resulted in richer accounts and a sense on my part that they responded without feelings of coercion or pressure.

In-depth interviews.

I carried out in-depth interviews with five of the focal students (see Figure 2) and all of these students' teachers at the school (see Figure 1). I planned to interview more students, but was unable to due to time constraints, inconsistent attendance and several of the students moved on to other schools before I could interview them. I conducted semi-formal interviews—that is, I followed interview protocols (see Appendices B and C for complete protocols), yet tried to maintain a conversational tone and asked follow up questions to understand particular nuances and details of their respective narratives. The

purpose of the teacher interviews was to gain insights into the larger cultural context of the school and understand how teachers worked to create a nurturing and academic environment for their students. Interview questions elicited basic information about their personal and professional biographies, their perspectives on becoming a teacher, perceptions of their students and the meaning of literacy in their own lives and in their teaching. I had the opportunity to conduct several informal interviews with Nathaniel where he reflected on his teaching through out the year as well as one formal interview at the end of the year. All but one of the teacher interviews was conducted in English. I conducted Ernesto’s interview in Spanish as that was his preference. All of the teachers had lived abroad—some grew up in Latin America, while others lived abroad for extended periods of time through programs like the Peace Corp. Therefore, the teachers’ own experiences living abroad and/or their experiences living transnational lives may have also contributed to the context of this school. I explore this theme further in Chapter 4: The Context of the Study. The following chart represents the teachers that I interviews along with their country of birth and the date I interviewed them.

Teacher¹²	Subject(s) taught	Country of Birth	Interview Date(s)
Nathaniel (focal teacher)	English (level 3)	U.S. (Iowa)	10.11.2000 11.6.2000 11.9.2000 3.21.2001
Ernesto (focal teacher)	Spanish (all levels)	Argentina	1.29.2001
Jane	Social Studies	U.S. (Tennessee)	1.26.01
Elias	English (level 1) Computers	Peru	1.23.2001
Frank	Math	El Salvador	2.13.2001

Figure 1. Teacher Interviews

¹² All teacher and student names listed are pseudonyms

I conducted student interviews as a means of coming to know more about their educational backgrounds and their perceptions of their school (see Appendix C for student interview protocol) and community. I also asked specific questions related to students' funds of knowledge, including their experiences with literacy and language, the meaning of literacy and language in their lives (e.g. the meaning of music in their lives), and what they liked to do for fun. I conducted 4 of the 5 student interviews in Spanish (Yalila choose to do her interview in English). The interview transcripts complement my field notes and the written artifacts. The following figure represents the students I interviewed, their age at the time of the interview, country of birth, and the date of our interview.

Student	Age (at time of interview)	Country of Birth	Interview Date(s)
Sol	22	El Salvador	7.24.2001
Luis	20	Honduras	7.24.2001
Xiomara	19	El Salvador	3.21.2001
Milagros	19	El Salvador	3.20.2001
Yalila	16	El Salvador	3.22.2001

Figure 2. Student Interviews

Context documents.

Throughout my time in the field, I collected primary and secondary documents as data sources (see Figures 3 and 4). These helped me to frame the context of this study. In order to document the larger sociopolitical context of the classroom community, I collected hard copies of newspaper articles and downloaded news articles related to the Latino/a communities in the D.C. area from *The Washington Post*, *El Tiempo Latino* and *El Pregonero*—two of the local Spanish language newspapers. The Center maintains an archive of materials related to the development of the youth center and the local Latino/a community where I copied selected materials (e.g. newsletters and community/youth-

based newspapers from the 1970s and 1980s). Likewise the District of Columbia’s Martin Luther King, Jr. library maintains a local history archive, where I was able to copy selected oral histories conducted during the 1980s with local Central Americans.

I also collected documents directly related to the students’ lives. I kept drafts of students’ in-class writings as well as final projects, I copied worksheets handed out during the days I was present. I also copied students’ in-class journals. I maintained copies of the books, short stories and other texts they read as a whole class. I also noted the titles of books they read during “free reading time”. I took digital images of some of their group projects. On occasion students showed me flyers handed to them on their way to school. I copied, dated, and filed these artifacts and after class wrote up details regarding any conversation the students and I had around a given text. Ernesto, their Spanish teacher focused far more on reading than on writing and consequently, I maintained copies of the texts they read during his class, but have only a few examples of their writings from Spanish class.

Data Sources

Data sources include: fieldnotes, interview transcripts and notes, and classroom written artifacts (students’ presentation notes, daily journals, essays, worksheets and tests). The following chart depicts my primary data sources by type of data, source, and corresponding dates.

Type of Data	Source	Dates/ Notes
Fieldnotes/Notebooks	- Class and fieldtrip interactions - Interviews	9/20/2000-12/20/2000 1/3/2001-2/5/2001 2/6/2001-3/15/2001 3/19/2001-5/18/2001 7/12/2001-7/26/2001
Students’ written artifacts	- Folders with in-class writing	9/20/2000-7/26/2001

8 focal students (6 girls, 2 boys)	assignments, essays, quizzes and projects - Journals reflecting responses to warm-up questions (entire year) - Sample worksheets/handouts (interspersed throughout field note books) - Photos of quarterly final projects/presentations	
Interviews (conducted in English and Spanish)	5 of 8 focal students 5 teachers (including both focal teachers)	Focus: meaning of literacy, experiences with text outside of school Focus: community background, relationships with students, teaching philosophy
Copies of in-class teacher assigned texts	Class readings Handouts Books	

Figure 3. Primary Data Sources

Figure 4 illustrates primary and secondary data sources used to better understand the context of my research setting.

Type of Data	Source	Dates
Newsletters	Latin American Youth Center Archives	From 1970s
Community/youth written newspapers	Latin American Youth Center Archives	From 1980s
Newspaper articles charting community's demographic growth, challenges, and celebrations	Latin American Youth Center Archives; my own online research	From 1960s
Documents from exhibition on charting 30 years of art programs at the Youth Center	Latin American Youth Center Archives	From 1960s
Oral histories with local Central American community leaders	Washington, D.C. Public Library—Martin Luther King Jr. branch	From 1980s

Figure 4. Context Data Sources

Data Management

I entered typed field notes and interview transcripts into NVivo, a qualitative software program. This program facilitated open and axial coding, which I discuss in the next section. I also maintained corresponding notebooks comprised of printed field notes with date sensitive documents interspersed with relevant fieldnotes. For example if I collected a writing sample that a student produced on a given day, I would attach that document to the fieldnotes for that day. I maintained all context data in a separate file along with copies of students' journals and folders of supplemental student writings that the teacher gave me at the end of the school year. As a back up to the computer files, I kept printed versions of interview transcripts in respective teacher and student binders.

Data Analysis

I drew upon several interpretive approaches within qualitative traditions to systematically analyze my data (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw; Glazer and Strauss, 1967; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998, 2008). Through microanalysis analysis (see for example: Strauss and Corbin, 1998) I coded field notes, students' written artifacts, and the transcripts of student and teacher interviews. Briefly, microanalysis entailed reading through my corpus of qualitative data, as well as segments of the data, multiple times, line-by-line, and identifying categories within the data (Glazer and Straus, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Merriam, 1998). Through this process of analysis I sorted my data and developed categories, or codes, based on recurring themes. I began with open coding—that is, I identified and labeled initial categories within the data. Emerson, et. al. (2002) refers to the role of codes in the analytical process as follows:

Codes, then, take a specific event, incident, or feature and relate it to other events, incidents, or features, implicitly distinguishing this one from others. By comparing this event with “like” others, one can begin to identify more general analytic dimensions or categories. One can do this by asking what more general category this event belongs to, or by thinking about specific contrasts to the current event. (p. 148)

My process of coding went through several layers and was not always linear. In other words, during several forays into my fieldnotes, I began coding for a particular category, but as I made my way through the data, realized it was not as salient as I thought or that there were important sub-categories. At this point, I would note the other categories or return to the beginning of my fieldnotes and code for the new category as I continued coding for the old one. For example, at the onset of this study I was interested in how young people residing in urban centers engaged texts and narratives in their day-to-day lives. In my initial pass through the data, I openly coded for instances when these students drew upon their *day-to-day experiences* to respond to classroom assignments and/or to explain a given concept to myself or to their teachers. I also coded for their *references to the texts and narratives in their lives* – in and out of school. However, as I read through page after page of fieldnotes and interviews, I noticed how often these experiences and texts were directly or indirectly situated within the larger transnational context of their lives. As I thought back on the months I spent listening to the students at *New Beginnings*, jotting down their thoughts, reflections, arguments and questions, and more recently as I analyzed hundreds of pages of fieldnotes, I discerned how vital transnational dynamics were to their day-to-day routines, ways of navigating the city, and

how they situated themselves in D.C. And as I read more closely, I realized they did not simply refer to the past and to their home countries, rather they often did so by going back and forth in time and space to make sense of present day events and activities. I saw again and again how often they made sense of their lives by going back and forth from the present to the past in terms of El Salvador, other Central and Latin American countries, and the US. What is more, I also saw how these students and their teachers created spaces within the classroom that facilitated this transnational sense making.

Therefore, for my next pass at the data, I focused my coding specifically on transnational moments, noting for example: instances of transnational dynamics in their discussions, their responses to questions, writings, and interview transcripts, as well as their own accounts of their transnational journeys and memories. All of these transnational utterances, fieldnote and interview excerpts became my primary universe of data. There were approximately 90 such examples of discussions, single utterances, journal entries, and writings with a transnational reference point. I then read through all these examples and discerned patterns that led to a more nuanced understanding of both how these students experienced transnationalism in their lives broadly, which I present in Chapter 5, and how they brought those experiences to their classroom context which is the focus of Chapter 6.

Within this broad coding of students' references to the transnational dynamics in their lives, I discerned several patterns. At times they referred to *concrete experiences* such as phone calls to family members in Central America, sending funds to family members back home, emailing friends in El Salvador, frequenting online chat rooms and making friends with Salvadorans residing in different countries, reading online news

sources from and about El Salvador. Whereas another set of reference points were tied to these students sense making practices. Thus my *transnational experience* code referred to concrete transnational activities and practices and *transnational sense making* referred to these meaning-making practices, such as calling up memories from El Salvador to explain a present day experience or phenomena in DC.

With my data organized into two distinct categories – concrete experiences and ways of knowing or sense-making, I then moved to more focused, axial coding (Strauss, 1987) where I clustered excerpts of data around the axis of specific themes. For example, as I continued to read through the data excerpts related to the concrete transnational experiences of youth, I discerned particular sub-themes and began to organize the codes in terms of those themes and sub-themes. Some of my more focused codes within the *Transnational Experience* theme were: Communication Practices, Media Practices, Economic Practices. Likewise, some of the sub-categories that fell under the sense-making node were: Memories, Telling Legends, Comparing and Contrasting (e.g. an experience within the U.S. through the lens of growing up in El Salvador). The following chart depicts examples of these axial codes and the examples listed underneath.

<u>Transnational experiences</u>	<u>Sensemaking within a transnational social context</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Crossing the border - Day-to-day websites (e.g. news sources) - E-mail and chat rooms - Sending remittances - Sending and receiving gifts from home countries - Phone calls - Reading news sources about El Salvador online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Citing statistics from news sources - Telling cultural narratives - Contrasting labor markets between El Salvador and the U.S. - Memories of the Civil War - Recounting family members memories of El Salvador (including experiences with the war) - Meanings assigned to song lyrics - Meaning of remittances in transnational perspective - Meanings associated with their own

	work as wage earners - Awareness of inequality in transnational perspective
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Figure 5: Examples of Axial Codes and Examples of Code Labels

From the *sense making* code I culled more specific categories and patterns (e.g. personal histories and ways of knowing). I also noticed how these students often conveyed a transnational mindset. They did this by going back and forth, in time and geographic location, and calling up past and present experiences, perspectives, and memories to make sense of everyday events, concepts and texts. I coded these instances of referring back and forth in time and space as, *transnational ways of knowing*. Another way these students conveyed their transnational experiences was through the stories they told about their lives—which often intersected with the stories of their peers and important events in Salvadoran history. I coded these life stories, migration stories, and accounts of their families’ biographies as, *personal histories*. As I analyzed the data excerpts related to the *Transnational Personal History* theme. I re/clustered data segments around the following sub-themes: Legends, Reflections, Dreams, and Memories. While I analyzed these various data sources, I continuously asked iterative questions such as: How did these students experience transnationalism? What did these transnational processes mean to them? How did these processes influence how they saw themselves? How did these students talk about their experiences in the U.S. and El Salvador/Central America? What kinds of questions did they ask—about classroom texts, each other, the United States, El Salvador?

During this stage of more focused coding, I also examined how students invoked their transnational experiences within particular social contexts. For example, their transnational practices with members of their social networks in the United States, in

many ways facilitated the resources they were able to generate across national borders as well as the meanings and ways of knowing they developed through these practices. By considering the larger social context of their transnational experiences, I further discerned how students invoked their experiences and personal histories in the context of reading, writing and talking about academic texts.

Throughout these stages of data analysis, I continued to engage in a dialogical process within the data, where I discerned tentative themes, developed working assertions and crafted concept maps to show connections between themes. I used NVivo to isolate a particular code or node and then printed all utterances related to that node. I read through the data excerpts associated with particular nodes with my working assertions in mind and took marginal notes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) and eventually wrote analytical memos. Within these cycles of the analytical process, I continuously noted patterns that eventually lead to firmer findings and implications.

At this point in the analysis, it was clear to me that these students were engaged in class assignments with transnational themes, but I wanted to understand how that engagement came about and the patterns within that engagement, as well as the nature of that engagement. Therefore, in order to address these specific questions regarding engagement, I coded my data in terms of classroom specific processes and along several strands through an ongoing analytical inquiry process guided by some of the following questions:

- How did a given transnational classroom context/moment come about?
- Was it student generated?
- Was it teacher generated?

- What role did texts play?
- What made a given interaction transnational?
- How did that interaction come about and what were the implications for academic literacy practices?

As I worked to better comprehend how this classroom context came about I read through my data and examined each transnational moment for the action and/or text that prompted that moment. I also counted (Miles and Huberman, 1994) the occurrences of different types of prompts in order to more precisely distinguish between prompts and identify overall patterns within the enactments of this transnational classroom context. From this analysis, I determined that most transnational moments or interactions were prompted by the teacher – via either a verbal question or comment and often in combination with a written prompt or text. There were a cluster of moments generated by peer-to-peer questions or comments, but those occurred less frequently. The following chart illustrates the distribution of who and what prompted a given transnational classroom moment.

Prompting Transnational Classroom Moments	
Teacher Question	46
- Journal Prompt	20
- Assignment Prompt	10
Teacher Comment	15
Text	41
Peer Quest	1
Peer Comment	15
Presentation	1

Figure 6: Frequencies Related to Classroom Context

As I worked to understand the larger context of this engagement, I also coded for the characteristics of a given transnational moment and discerned that overwhelmingly

these transnational moments came about in the context of whole group discussions, although a smaller subset came about through one-on-one discussions, side conversations among students, and small group discussions. Figure 7 illustrates this distribution.

Transnational Moment Embedded in Type of Activity	
Whole Group	61
Small Group	4
One-on-one	11
Exchange on side	5
Between class	5
Fieldtrip	1

Figure 7: Frequencies of Transnational Moment by Type of Activity

In thinking about the dimensions of these moments, I also noticed patterns within a **continuum of engagement**¹³. That is, not every transnational moment was highly engaging and even within moderately versus highly engaged moments these youth engaged distinctly. For example within moments of intense engagement, the students may have actively discussed a given topic by drawing from their life experiences and laughing, or they could have been actively resisting a given assignment, also by drawing from their life experiences, though focused on challenging their teacher's rationale for a given assignment. In Figure 8 I present the distribution of highly engaged versus moderately engaged moments.

Degree of Engagement within Transnational Moments	
Highly Engaged	55
Moderately	26
Not Engaged	2

Figure 8: Frequencies Representing Continuum of Transnational Engagement

Finally, I worked to understand what made a given interaction transnational. Was it simply that a given student referred to their country of origin when answering a

¹³ See Chapter 6 for further definition and elaboration of the concept of engagement.

question? Were transnational moments always characterized by the practice of students going back and forth in time and space to call up examples and memories from the past and present spaces of their lives? As I read through my data time and again, I characterized these transnational instances along the following strands depicted below in Figure 9:

Properties	Number of instances
Reference to one nation in terms of other	28
Reference to another nation	24
Reference to student's country of origin in context of U.S. based activity	39
Alluding to marginal status in country of origin	17
Reference to exp that signals existence in 2 nations and/or in-between 2 nations	19
Reference to their own migration experience	19

Figure 9: Properties of Transnational Sensemaking in Classroom Context

In order to represent some of the patterns I discerned through this comparative microanalysis, I utilized Erickson's (1987) analysis strategy of key linkage charts. Erickson defines this strategy as follows, "A key linkage is key in that it is of central significance for the major assertions the researcher wants to make. The key linkage is linking in that it connects up many items of data," (Erickson, 1987: 147). Thus, I also created analytical charts organized around a particular theme. I used concept maps and key linkage charts to represent particularly salient patterns. Through this process, I added or deleted a given theme to the concept map and continued reading the larger corpus of data. At times I identified unanticipated examples and pushed myself to re-work my initial key linkage chart. Thus these processes of analysis were both chronological and dialectical.

Through line-by-line coding (Emerson, et. al., 2002) and theorizing patterns across and within data categories, I came to a deeper understanding of how students' transnational experiences emerged in the context of research participants' day-to-day lives including the reading and writing they did in school. Therefore, the coding process (see for example: Strauss, 1987; Emerson, 2002) was both sequential and dynamic. In sum, rigor demanded that I go through my entire data set or large stretches of it and code line by line. This level of specificity enabled me to identify both categories and patterns that may not have been apparent to me during the actual data collection and as a participant observer.

In the following chapter, I presented how the students who participated in this research were nested within a layered social context. Beginning with a brief historical overview of the historical context of El Salvador, the sending context of most of the students, I then move to descriptions of their city, neighborhood, and school contexts in terms of historical and contemporary transnational dynamics.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Through out the time I spent at *New Beginnings Charter School* and the subsequent years living in the neighborhood of the school, the young people who participated in this research continually referred to their countries of origin and their transnational experiences as they made sense of their classroom texts and their day-to-day lives. These references did not occur in isolation and were not simply a product of their migration from one country to another. Rather, the ways these students led their lives along with the confluence of particular historical events and their own biographies, all influenced who they were and how they interpreted their worlds. What is more, their ongoing transnational economic and communication practices did not erupt in the current moment, they were also part of a continuum of transnational economic and political phenomena that have occurred over the past century between El Salvador and the United States. Therefore, in this chapter, I examine the various social contexts of the youth who participated in this study. I begin by highlighting particular moments within the history of the nation of El Salvador, and focus on the past 50 years as the political and economic dynamics of the past half-century most directly influenced the transnational context of the youth who were a part of this study. While an in-depth history of the people, policies, and cultural practices of El Salvador is well beyond the scope of this chapter and dissertation study, I discuss how intersecting events, policies, and economic forces

brought about escalating levels of migration to the U.S. broadly and the D.C. area specifically. I frame these historical moments in terms of events leading up to the Salvadoran civil war of the 1980s, the war period, and its impact on migration patterns to the U.S.

Many of the participants of this study did not vividly remember living through the war as perhaps their parents and elder family members do. However, it was within this decade of war that most of them were born. By contrast, a few of the older students did share memories of the war at various points during the year of my data collection including the role their family played in the war, the chaos associated with its aftermath, and the ways their elders (often grandparents as their parents already resided in the U.S.) attempted to protect them from state violence.

Shifting from El Salvador, the context of emigration, to the context of reception for many of these youth, I review of the history of immigration in Washington, DC from the 1950s to the present. I continue to narrow my discussion of the context of this research by moving from the city level to the neighborhood level. I offer a brief history of the Mt. Pleasant and Columbia Heights neighborhoods, the physical communities of this research. Within this context I explore the growth of a sense of community and sense of place for Latinos in D.C. and specifically for Salvadorans. Narrowing my discussion from the neighborhoods of this research to the physical building where the majority of my work took place, I discuss the history of the community The Center that houses *New Beginnings Charter School*. Finally, I conclude the chapter with profiles of the two focal teachers and the 8 focal students.

History of El Salvador: Transnationalism and Migration over Time

The nation of El Salvador was established in 1821, however economically and politically, it functioned as part of the United Provinces of Central America comprised of: El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras until 1838 (see for example Menjivar, 2000). El Salvador's initial transnational relationship was an economic one derived from its agricultural economy. Products such as coffee and sugar were cultivated in El Salvador and exported to the U.S. (Menjivar, 2000; Pedersen, 2002, 2004; Repak, 1995) Furthermore, with coffee as its major export commodity, El Salvador was heavily dependent on the U.S. for sustainability (Pedersen, 2002; Menjivar, 2000).

Over time El Salvador has been a nation dependent upon its agricultural base. Until the mid to late 20th century, it was run by an oligarchy with the majority of the country's wealth situated within a few families. The majority of the population were (and still are) comprised of *campesinos* who work the land for low wages. While fourth and fifth generation Salvadorans in California indicate Salvadoran migration to the U.S., during the late 1800s, the flow of people was minimal. The conditions for revolution and mass migration in later decades—namely the 1980s and 1990s were set by a confluence these economic and power dynamics of the late 19th century and early 20th century. For example, a concentration of power articulated via the oligarchy, an economic structure dependent on few products, and severe disparities in land ownership and wealth set the context for the revolution of the 80s and 90s (Menjivar, 2000).

The 1920s-1930s: Political and Economic Backdrop to the Civil War and Migration Movements

The stage for the most intense period of Salvadoran migration – the 1980s and 1990s, was set during the 1920s. During the 1920s and for decades to come the military

and oligarchy shared power. Backed by the Salvadoran military, a small percentage of wealthy families controlled the vast majority of land in the country, where coffee - the major Salvadoran export - was grown and harvested by *campesinos*. Therefore, economic disparities manifested in land ownership with fifty seven percent of arable land situated within two percent of farms (Menjivar, 2000). At this time the transnational relationship between the U.S. and El Salvador was limited to the export of coffee to wealthier more developed nations, but most heavily to the U.S. Because of this relationship, when the U.S. stock market crashed in 1929, followed by a lengthy economic depression, the ripple effects were felt by wealthy landowners as well as rural workers who could not rely on the funds from exports (Shayne, 2004). The severe economic disparities in this nation and its dependence on the U.S. are themes that would continue throughout this century bringing about grassroots organizing, as well as government and military responses, and the eventual migration of hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans to earn dollars in the U.S. However, during the 1920s and 1930s the level of migration was negligible.

During the 1920s the threads of the local communist party were woven by Farabundo Marti, later the namesake of a progressive political and military coalition that fought against the Salvadoran government on behalf of rural, indigenous, and urban working class Salvadorans. The Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) (*The Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation*) became a major coalition of working people and others committed to issues of social justice. There was not political and methodological consensus among all groups comprising the FMLN, nevertheless, their collective efforts initiated systematic political organizing for economic justice during this time (Menjivar, 2000). During the early 1930s students, peasants, and

indigenous groups expressed their commitment to greater economic equity through organized efforts for equitable land distribution – between wealthy and peasant/indigenous peoples (Danner, 1994; Menjivar, 2000).

In 1931, democratically elected president Araujo was overthrown by a military coup and General Hernandez, then vice president, became president. The government interpreted this as a communist rebellion and executed, “the defense of ‘order’,” a strategy to maintain the political and economic status quo (Alvarenga, 1996, p. 327 cited in Menjivar, 2000). Correspondingly, *La Organización Democrática Nacionalista* - National Democratic Organization (ORDEN) was created by the government and comprised a network of informers who reported any “communist” or leftist activity. During a two-month period, 30,000 people were murdered (1.6 % of the population; 28.6% in the western region) due to their communist leanings or any activity that was deemed suspicious. This first internal war in the nation of El Salvador was known as “La Matanza” (the Slaughter). *La Matanza* took place in a region of the country where seventy five percent of the coffee was cultivated and also where many indigenous people lived. Among the outcomes of *La Matanza* was a further consolidation of the power of owning classes and the military and an end to socioeconomic organizing efforts for justice of the previous 50 years. After this initial civil conflict, the elite were once again at liberty to garner profits with minimal resistance from the working people/peasant classes. This element of Salvadoran history is noteworthy because *La Matanza* set a precedent for government aggression toward its own people that would be replicated 50 years later at the onset of the civil war. The 30s also saw the devastating combination of a disparate economic system, military force, elite power and state sanctioned murder of

thousands of Salvadoran citizens. A similar combination of forces would prompt the transnational migration flows of the 1980s and 1990s. However, in the 1930s these economic, political, military forces brought about more internal than external migration as *campesinos* moved to other parts of the country to secure work, and later to neighboring Honduras (Menjivar, 2000).

The 1960s: Setting the Stage for Future Migratory Movements

By the 1960s organizing efforts among students, *campesinos* and the FMLN were reinvigorated. At this same time, struggles for economic equity continued throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, thus establishing transnational political networks and influences throughout Latin America (Hamilton and Chinchilla, 2001; Menjivar, 2000). These struggles were in part guided by liberation theology, a progressive arm of the Catholic Church. In El Salvador liberation theology manifested through progressive priests who taught residents of rural areas how to read and write, trained teachers, and organized health care services and cooperative farms so that *campesinos* could sustain themselves and survive the harsh conditions of their lives (Hamilton and Chinchilla, 2001; Menjivar, 2000; Shayne, 2006). This portion of the church also spread their message by developing Christian schools and teaching local rural residents how to read and write (Danner, 1994). During the 1960s, and to some extent the 1920s and 1930s, the extreme economic and political disparities in the nation of El Salvador were challenged by various coalitions from the left, including priests who practiced liberation theology. These efforts created an infrastructure and ideological frame, which brought about a much stronger and well-developed efforts of the 1980s.

The 1960s saw a critical mass of Salvadorans begin to migrate to the U.S. (San Francisco and the District of Columbia) (Cadaval, 1994; Menjivar, 2000). During these early years of transnational migration, Salvadorans migrated to D.C. as diplomats and domestic workers (Cadaval, 1994; Modan, 2006; Repak, 1995). At this time, a cross section of Latin American emigrants and Salvadorans, established an infrastructure scaffold in D.C., that later generations of Latin American migrants and Latino/as would fill in and build upon. However, during the 60s Salvadoran migration within Central America was far greater than external migration. For example, in 1969 Salvadorans made up 12% of the Honduran population (Jelin, 2003; Mason, 1992; Menjivar, 2000).

Again, as regards this dissertation study, the time period of the Salvadoran civil war prompted the largest migration of Salvadorans to the U.S., particularly to Washington, D.C. Many of the parents of the youth who participated in this study left El Salvador during the 1980s for economic and political reasons, while their children stayed behind with grandparents and other family members until their parents earned enough money to send for them. In the next sections, I describe elements of a national and local context that became untenable for many Salvadorans to continue to live and/or provide for their families. The descent toward the civil began in the late 1970s.

The 1970s: Precursors to War

By the end of the 1970s the economy further destabilized due to a decline in demand for Salvadoran exports and access to foreign credit (Menjivar, 2000). Many multinational corporations also left during this time and foreign investment declined from thirty percent during the 1960s to eight percent in the 1980s (Menjivar, 2000). The 1970s also saw parallel political organizing on the part of workers, urban poor, trade unionists,

professionals, students and peasants. Simultaneously, leftist guerillas gained strength as the government continued to repress these efforts (Menjivar, 2000).

In 1972 the military influenced the election, and the Christian Democratic ticket, led by Jose Napoleon Duarte, lost. By the end of the decade, after another stolen election, moderate leftist activists joined with populist forces and hundreds of thousands of protesters organized and participated in demonstrations in San Salvador. While much of the civil war was fought in rural sectors of the country, the precursors to the war occurred in urban areas such as the capital of San Salvador. For example, it was the urban infrastructure of the left (political organizers, labor leaders, activists) who organized the protests of the late 1970s (Danner, 1994; Menjivar, 2000). During the onset of the war, these intellectuals and activists were easy targets for the military and government intelligence officers because they were not armed (Danner, 1994). During this time the Reagan administration restored military aid to the Salvadoran government (Menjivar, 2000), swayed by fears that the people of El Salvador would be influenced by the rising struggles in neighboring countries like Nicaragua, given mass street demonstrations there (Danner, 1994).

The 1980s: Civil War Period

The impetus for emigration for many Salvadorans during the 1980s was political more than economic. Many, many people feared for their lives, especially if family members or residents of their villages “disappeared.” However, given the economic nature of this political struggle, the political and economic were intertwined. Therefore in this next section, I discuss some of the particular dynamics of this civil war as they relate

to the transnational social field that framed many of the day-to-day experiences of the youth who participated in this dissertation study.

The twelve-year civil war began in 1980 and ended with the Peace Accords in 1992. The forces that led to this war were rooted in economic disparities between landowners and *campesinos* that I described above. By the 1980s the leftist opposition to the government was comprised of 5 armed left wing groups (Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP), Fuerzas Populares de liberacion (FPL), Fuerzas Armadas de Resistencia Nacional (FARN), Partido Revolucionario de Trabajadores Centroamericanos (PRTC), Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion (FAL)—part of the Partido Comunista Salvadoreña) organized as the Frente Farabundo Marti para La Liberacion Nacional (FMLN) (Baker-Cristales, 2004). In the present contemporary political scene the FMLN has become a formal political party and the ERP and FARN combined to form the Partido Demócrata (PD), another party (Baker-Cristales, 2004).

Throughout 1981, the violence on the part of the Salvadoran military was so random and severe that 8,000 corpses could be found on the streets each month (Danner, 1994). Salvadoran intelligence officers organized death squads by recruiting police and National guardsmen who wanted extra money. These individuals were hired to collect information related to progressive causes. During this time, the U.S. government maintained that rightist vigilantes were responsible for murders rather than the U.S. sponsored Salvadoran army (Danner, 1994).

As the organizing efforts of the 1970s and early 1980s escalated, some villages were seen as sympathetic to the *guerilleros*, whereas others were more aligned with the government. What is more, the central combatants of the war were the Salvadoran

military forces and guerilla soldiers. But the lines were often blurred. In the haze of a war often fought in rural communities and villages, allegiances were not always clear, and remaining “neutral” could be seen as a sign of betrayal. Therefore, many, many civilians were murdered due to the side they chose or not choosing a side at all. The *Mozote* massacre in the region of Morazan is perhaps the most extensive and tragic example of this dynamic. Morazan was relatively neutral as its residents maintained only tentative relationships with both sides. What is more, about half of the residents of this village were Protestant Evangelicals and known to be anti-communist (Danner, 1994). The absence of political affiliation or even leanings away from the FMLN was part of what made the massacre particularly random and senseless (Danner, 1994). Suspected of sympathizing with the left, Salvadoran soldiers obliterated the entire town¹⁴ - the seventy five thousand people died in *El Mozote*. While journalists were present in El Salvador and covered this event, they were forced by the US government to retract their stories published in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* during the early 1980s (Danner, 1994; Rodriguez, 2001, 2005). Thus the U.S. government was involved in this war not only in terms of the financing, but also in terms of the silencing of the most brutal operation of the entire war.

In terms of the present study, the tragedy of *El Mozote* is important because it is part of the collective memory of Salvadoran migrants who are members of the generation of the war. Younger migrants, who reside in DC now, may or may not know about this event depending on the stories of their parents and other elder family members.

The war had a devastating impact on the Salvadoran economy and prompted massive migration. By 1983 unemployment was nearly forty percent and

¹⁴ Rufina Amaya was the sole survivor of this massacre (see for example Danner, 1994; Rodriguez, 2005).

underemployment was measured at eighty percent (Menjivar, 2000; Repak, 1995). During this time the Reagan administration restored military aid to El Salvador sending 1.5 million dollars per day to El Salvador to support the Salvadoran economy via the military. As entire villages were terrorized by government forces or pressured by the FMLN to serve their vision, *campesinos* fled to other regions. By 1983, 400,000 Salvadoran citizens were displaced in their own country. Mexico and other countries in Central America hosted an additional 200,000 Salvadoran refugees.

During the war, government tactics shifted back to terror strategies employed around the time of La Matanza. That is, those suspected of anti-government involvement were picked up, interrogated, tortured and/or murdered (Lauria-Santiago, 2005; Menjivar, 2000). Menjivar (2000), elaborates as follows:

“During this period, families were separated, not only by migration but also by death, imprisonment, exile, or one of the most terrifying and omnipresent acts, the disappearance of a loved one.” (p. 51)

The presence of informants, known as “orejas” (ears), also infiltrated the social structure and undermined the basic trust between neighbors and even family members. This fissure in the fabric of Salvadoran relationships was another damaging consequence of the Civil War period and its aftermath.

I present the above historical context to illustrate the civic, economic, and human instability that impacted everyday life for the majority of Salvadorans during the 1980s. Many of the young people who migrated to the U.S. during the 1990s, including the participants of this dissertation study, came of age during this civil war. Therefore, for

many of them, their childhood memories included glimpses of the carnage of the war or the sense that adults were always cautious and anticipating the worst.

Another dimension of the 80s in part prompted by the war, was the onset of an extensive transnational social field between El Salvador and the United States. An increase in the numbers of Salvadoran emigrants, and the growth of Salvadoran/Latino/a institutions in DC (e.g. non-profits, banks, Mayor's office for Latino Affairs, and to some extent, the local schools) to support these transnational networks were all facets of this social field (Pedersen, 2002; Gammage, 2006). The steep increase in migration during the 1980s was the result of various factors. For example, push factors such as the severe economic disparities and repressive political forces that proliferated during the civil war caused many Salvadorans to migrate abroad. During this time, several other Central American countries were undergoing civil strife and economic collapse, therefore Central American migration was a less viable option (Jelin, 2003). Concurrently, pull factors such as an overall population growth in Washington, D.C. created a labor shortage that made D.C. an appealing site of reception for many migrants. This inviting economic context combined with existing social networks established by earlier migrants in the 1960s and 1970s facilitated the migration of tens of thousands of Salvadorans during the 1980s (Repak, 1995).

In sum, during the 1980s fears related to the war combined with economic challenges pushed many Salvadorans to migrate to the United States, and pull factors such as the opportunity to earn relatively high wages in the U.S. supported this migration. More recently, economic more than political factors, prompted Salvadorans to emigrate, aided, for some, by familial networks in the U.S. established during the 1970s and 1980s

(Repak, 1995). The youth who participated in this dissertation study migrated to the U.S. during the 1990s.

The 1990s: Migration and Memory in the Postwar Period

The Civil War officially ended in 1992 with Peace Accords signed by officials from the Government of El Salvador and the FMLN in Chapultepec, México (see for example: Popkin, M., 2000; Montgomery, 1995). While this document officially ended the war, the aftermath of the war lingers in the memories of survivors and their children. As I stated earlier, many of the youth research participants of this dissertation study grew up in a country at war. This means that their memories of their home countries are laced with images of grandparents, urban structures and rural landscapes, and for some like Sol, flashes of dead bodies in the streets, or for Sofi, the moment when they heard about an aunt or an uncle who was *taken away*. By contrast, Xiomara learned about the war with her Spanish teacher at *New Beginnings* versus through her lived experiences or from stories from her relatives. Rodriguez (2001, 2005) notes the importance of recuperating memories and understandings of the war for this new generation of U.S based Salvadorans as a way of healing Salvadorans throughout the diaspora. Towards this end, part of the government's healing and recuperation process has included promoting the legends and oral stories that are part of rural communities ravaged by the war (Rodriguez, 2001, 2005). Preserving this sense of collective memory may also be an important way to bring together grand/parents and children representing two (or more) generations, who at times experience tensions due to many years of living a part and, for the youth, their changing world views as a result of experiencing adolescence in a new nation (Faulstich-Orellana, 2009; Suarez-Orozco, 2001; 2008).

In addition to the memories many Salvadorans hold in their minds and narratives, the aftermath of the war was also felt at an economic level. Many multinational corporations left during the war (see for example: Wood and Roberts, 2005) and the local municipal and business infrastructure was crippled during this time. Thus increasingly, the Salvadoran government and economy has come to depend on the remittances of migrants to places like Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles (Gammage, 2006; Pedersen, 2002). In cities like Washington, D.C., rural migrants are able to earn wages sufficient to support themselves in the U.S. as well as family members back home (Pedersen, 2002).

These remittances are transferred within a larger global context; in 2004 remittances to Latin America amounted to over 40 billion dollars, exceeding the amount of foreign direct investment and official development aid to the area (Gammage, 2006). Approximately seventy three percent of farming families and fifty six percent of all rural families in El Salvador receive remittances (Gammage, 2006; Fajnzylber, & Lopez, 2008). One of the reasons the Salvadoran economy has become so dependent on these remittances relates to the shift in the economic base of this country. In 1960 agriculture accounted for almost thirty two percent of Gross Domestic Product, whereas in 2004 agriculture accounted for only nine percent of the GDP with the sharpest decline taking place between the years 1980 and 2000 – the war years and post war years. This economic downfall came about as a result of a decline in the demand for export commodities (e.g. coffee) and an increase in imports of typically domestic products (e.g. rice and beans) (Gammage, 2006). Gammage explicates as follows:

The Salvadoran economy is now a service and transit economy, importing consumer goods and exporting people; old agricultural-based elites have shifted

into construction, transportation and communications, freight services, and the financial sector—activities that rely extensively on migration and remittances for capital and sales. Sixty-one percent of GDP is generated in services (2006:83).

On a household-by-household basis migration actually helps alleviate poverty as migrants send money back to their family members. Most of the young-adults who participated in this study actively participated in these flows of money and resources to family members in their hometowns. However, there are sharp disparities between households that receive remittances and those that do not. Therefore, while overall poverty levels in El Salvador have decreased during the 1990s, migration and remittances do not bring about integrated and sustained reforms and structures (e.g. small businesses) with the potential to raise the quality of life for all Salvadorans. What is more, migration (often undocumented) and the remittances that follow have become a development strategy for the Salvadoran state, associated financial institutions, the U.S. government, and multilateral organizations (Gammage, 2006; Pedersen, 2002). For example, representatives of these economic bodies set up the infrastructure (e.g. local banks, and technical resources to accept remittances) to channel remittances of migrants back into the local economies of El Salvador (Gammage, 2006; Pedersen, 2002). International institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank also actively support reforms and financial structures that encourage the flows of remittances into less wealthy nations.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) policies are two such reforms that allow Salvadorans to stay in the U.S. to work and support the remittance economy, yet not as full participants in the society.

IRCA allowed immigrants who arrived prior to 1982 to apply to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) for legal resident status. Whereas, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) policies in 1990 enabled Salvadorans, among other groups, to receive work authorization permits for 6-18 months. After that time they are eligible to apply for an extension or for Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) status (Gammage, 2006). At the same time these measures do not grant recipients access to health care or public assistance.

Hamilton and Chinchilla (2001) discuss how the experiences of Central Americans in the U.S. (Salvadorans and Guatemalans) are mediated by transnational factors such as happenings in their home countries, the aftermath of migration journeys, and the challenges of establishing new lives, usually within urban centers in the United States. As migrants shift from one context to the other they work toward building a sense of community, attending to their civil and human rights in the U.S., as they work to sustain ties back home (Hamilton and Chinchilla, 2001). In the section that follows I describe the demographic context of reception for many migrants, as well as some of the events and organizations that have helped Latino/as to create a sense of place and community in the District.

Context of Reception: Latino/as in Washington, D.C.

Central and Latin American migration to DC occurred within larger transnational dynamics in the city and its surrounding areas. By the year 2000, D.C. was the seventh largest immigrant gateway in the United States (Singer, 2003). New immigrants made up half the population growth in the area (47.5% of the District's foreign born arrived between 1990 and 2000). The D.C. Metro area received 575,000 new immigrants

between 1980 and 2000 tripling the immigrant population in the area from 256,535 to 832,016 people (17% of population). During that same period of time, the D.C. Metro area grew from 1.5 million to 5 million people (42% growth rate) (Singer, 2003). While the 1980s saw the most rapid growth in immigrant populations, the 1990s saw the largest gains in actual numbers (Singer, 2003). Three quarters of all immigrants arrived from 30 countries with the greatest proportion coming from El Salvador. The larger trends are as follows: thirty nine percent of immigrants to the D.C. metro area are from Latin America and the Caribbean, thirty six percent of immigrants migrate from Asia, twelve percent from Europe, and eleven percent of the District's immigrants emigrate from Africa (Singer, 2003).

The D.C. Metro area has the second largest Salvadoran population in the U.S. next to Los Angeles (Singer, 2003). While Los Angeles has a larger population in terms of numbers, "DC is the only city in the country where the dominant Latino culture is Salvadoran," (Modan, 2006: 63). During the 1980s and 1990s, the District's Latino/a population expanded rapidly, growing over 346% since 1980 (Cadaval, 1998; Repak, 1998; U.S. Census, 2000).

While, the presence of Latino/as in the District has been most visible since the 1980s, there has been a loosely knit sense of a Latino/a community in Washington, D.C. since the 1950s. At that time, the Latino/a population was comprised of Latin American international students, Puerto Rican and Mexican American federal workers (often transplants from the northeast and west coast/southwest), and Latin American embassy professionals and support staff (Cadaval, 1998; Modan, 2006; Singer, 2003). The

Immigration Act of 1965 brought an end to quotas for visas based on race or nationality and led to an influx of Latin Americans (mostly from South America) to the D.C. area.

Some of these migrants were related to earlier waves of domestic workers associated with the embassies (Cadaval, 1998; Modan, 2006; Repak, 1995). The late 1960s and early 1970s, also saw the presence of D.C. Latino/as institutionalized through entities such as—The Mayor’s Office on Latino Affairs, ESL classes in local public schools and adult education The Centers (Singer, 2003), and social services targeted at Latino/as. As early as 1967, the Washington Post featured articles about the concerns of the local “Spanish” community. Such press coverage suggests that individuals from various Latin American backgrounds united around collective concerns, formed a sense of a “Spanish” community, and were beginning to receive press recognition.

Cadaval (1998) uses the *Latino Festival* as a case study to provide historical perspectives related to the rise of a sense of community among Latino/as from diverse backgrounds in Washington D.C. In 1969 the first Latino Festival was held in D.C. This was a significant event in the history of D.C. and the local Latino community, because it was one of the first organized pan-Latino cultural and political events in the District, attracting thousands of people and claiming a sense of place for members of these various communities. In addition to their efforts with the Festival, young people from South America and Puerto Rico also began to take on leadership roles and advocated for Latino/as within the District around issues such as housing, language policies and race relations within the city as well as making connections to political and economic struggles in Latin America (Cadaval, 1998). However, during the 1980s the Latino/a

population in the District transformed from a cross-section of Latin American origins to majority Salvadoran-Latino/a population.

The Transnational and Migration Context of Washington, D.C.

Washington is an international city in terms of its residents as well as its institutions. Since World War II the D.C. metro region's economic growth has been related to a growing federal government system and international organizations like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Organization of American States (OAS) (Singer, 2003). These international organizations function at a transnational level *from above*—that is, they operate at the macro structural level of global policies transacting billions of dollars around the world (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998). Within the District of Columbia there are in many ways two distinct cities – one that is local and one that is national. Modan (2006) speaks to this dichotomy in her distinction between *Washington*, the Nation's Capital versus the *District*. *Washington* is comprised of the Capitol, the White House, and multilateral organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. That is, *Washington* encompasses the power brokers and institutions that run the nation and influence global affairs. By contrast, the *District* is made up of local neighborhoods, such as Mt. Pleasant and Columbia Heights, and families who have resided in the D.C. area for generations.¹⁵

In the context of my study, this distinction between *Washington* and *the District* is important for two main reasons. It is in *Washington* that many of the transnational policies that directly impact these students are developed. Whereas, in *the District*, local

¹⁵ Transplants to D.C. often remark that, *no one is really from D.C.* due to the high numbers of people who move to the city from across the US and around the world. However, this is really a misnomer when one considers families, particularly African Americans who have lived in the area for generations.

Salvadoran and Latin Americans live, work, and engage in a variety of transnational communication and economic practices. At *the District* level, people engage transnational practices through for example, everyday phone calls and trips to the local banking The Center. For these young people the boundaries between *the District* and *Washington* were blurred at times, as when they rode the bus into downtown to work as cleaners of the office buildings in *Washington* or discussed how the latest immigration policy would impact their lives. What is more, they were very conscious of how they were positioned at the margins in *Washington*. And yet, as they talked about community, they claimed the *District* as a Latino/a and African American space.

The Neighborhood Context: Mt. Pleasant and Columbia Heights

Geographically, the communities of this research were the adjacent neighborhoods of Columbia Heights and Mt. Pleasant, also known as the Latino/a neighborhoods within the city. While census tracks distinguish these areas as distinct neighborhoods, community members I met over the years often imagined it as one community. *New Beginnings*, my research site, is also located here. In the next section, I situate the community within a larger demographic and socioeconomic context and then move on to a more ethnographic description.

By and large immigrants in D.C. reside in moderate to high income neighborhoods, Mt. Pleasant and Columbia Heights being the exceptions¹⁶ (Singer, 2003). While there is a higher concentration of poverty in these neighborhoods, compared with other gateway cities (New York, Los Angeles and Houston), D.C. has a relatively low proportion of immigrants living in poverty (half as many proportionally as New

¹⁶ At the time of data collection Columbia Heights and Mt. Pleasant by and large had low to moderately priced housing. More recently, development and gentrification have raised the overall cost of housing, though the area remains diverse in terms of race, ethnicity and social class.

York, Los Angeles, and Houston) (Singer, 2003). Presently, the majority of D.C. Salvadoran/Central Americans reside in the Mt. Pleasant/Columbia Heights neighborhoods (Modan, 2006; Singer, 2003). Immigrants comprised approximately thirty percent of Mt. Pleasant/Columbia Heights communities (with Salvadorans comprising almost half of this group). By contrast most neighborhoods in D.C. have lower percentages of immigrant residents (Singer, 2003). Mt. Pleasant/Columbia Heights was also home to a contingent of residents who were active in progressive causes (e.g. environmental activists, immigration rights advocates) and artists (Modan, 2006)ⁱⁱ.

During the time of my data collection, processes of gentrification were just underway, yet young and adult Latino/as still considered the area part of their community. These shifting community demographics could be seen in the contrast between who owned versus rented residential and business properties. In 1999, seventy percent of businesses were minority owned (Latino/a or Korean), yet people of color only owned 27% of the premises that housed these businesses (Modan, 2006). In the two Mt. Pleasant census tracts, property ownership was distributed along the following racial lines. In one census tract, European American white people comprised thirty percent of the population, whereas they comprised thirty seven percent of the other tract. However, they owned forty three percent and fifty three percent of the property in these respective tracts. African Americans comprised twenty nine percent and eighteen percent of these local communities and owned twenty two percent and forty percent of the property in these corresponding census tracts. Finally, Latino/as made up twenty eight percent and thirty four percent of these two census tracts, yet owned only twelve percent of the properties within both these tracks (Schaller and Modan, 2005).

The above discrepancy between who resided in the neighborhood versus who had a presence and who owned its infrastructure was a dynamic process when I collected data in 2000/2001. Even if young Latinos and youth of color more broadly did not reside in Mt. Pleasant or Columbia Heights, they traveled to the area on a daily basis to go to school, worship, or work, among other activities. There was also a sizeable presence of Latino/a and African and African American youth in the area due to several traditional public schools and charter schools as well as large non profit organizations developed to serve these multifaceted communities. Therefore, as I walked around the community, people of color remained in the majority. However with time, economic development is pushing even more low-income people of color out of the area. In other words, this was and remains a community in transitionⁱⁱⁱ.

The students who participated in this study also identified with the larger Latino/a community surrounding the school and would often refer to themselves as members of the Latino (or Hispanic) community or “people,” as evidenced by the following excerpt from my interview with Sol.

<p>T: Como describiria este vecindario donde queda la escuela?</p>	<p><i>T: How would you describe the neighborhood around the school?</i></p>
<p>Sol: Una comunidad Latina...Y que los beneficios para todos las personas Latinas/Hispanas. Que La mayoria de los negocios tienen personas que hablan Español. Una gran ventaja muchos que acaban de venir y no saben Ingles.</p>	<p><i>Sol: It's a Latino community. And the benefits are for all the Latino/Hispanic people. That the majority of the businesses have people who speak Spanish. This is a great advantage to many who have just arrived here and do not know English.</i></p>

<p>T: Sol, que significa la palabra comunidad para ti? Que quiere decir esa palabra?</p> <p>Sol: Es como un grupo de personas que tienen los mismos raices. La misma lengua y que todos buscan al mismo beneficio. Por la comunidad hispana busca ____ un trabajo, una estabilidad economica, y pasaportes para las familias en los paises de uno...</p> <p>(Interview, 7.24.01)</p>	<p><i>T: Sol, what does the word community mean to you? What does that word mean?</i></p> <p><i>Sol: Its like a group of people who have the same roots, the same language, and that everyone seeks the same benefits. For the Hispanic community, they seek..., a job, economic stability, and passports(?) for the family of the countries where one is from.</i></p>
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The above excerpt is just one example of many. In day-to-day class discussions, these youth claimed this space and its people, as their community. And they also identified as members of larger Latino/a and Salvadoran communities. Therefore in terms of affiliation and physical location, these students considered the area surrounding their school to be their community¹⁷. However, this perspective was not true for all of the students. Luis' comments below indicated a more critical view of his "community."

<p>T: Crees que hay una comunidad latina o hispana aquí en Washington?</p> <p>L: No</p> <p>T: En los Estados Unidos?</p>	<p><i>T: Do you think there is a Latino/a community here, in Washington?</i></p> <p><i>Luis: No</i></p> <p><i>T: In the United States?</i></p>
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¹⁷ See Moje (2000) for a related discussion of differing meanings and definitions of *community* within community-based literacy research.

L: No, esta desintegrada. Esta volviendo a ser lo que esta en nuestras paises.	<i>L: No, its disintegrated. It is becoming like it is in our countries.</i>
Esta ahora leyendo el apellido, esta ...	<i>Now one reads the last name, its...</i>
No ayuda...	<i>[people] do not help...</i>
¿Como dices en ingles?	<i>How do you say it in English?</i>
No somos unidos...	<i>We are not united.</i>
(Interview, 7.24.2001)	

In this excerpt Luis identifies Latinos in D.C. (and the U.S. generally) as a community of affiliation with weak ties (*its disintegrated*). What is more, he uses his experiences in his country of origin (and those of his peers) as evidence for his opinion (*It is becoming like it is in our countries. Now one reads the last name*). Presumably he was referring to the practice of reading last names as indications of one’s social class status. However, as he critiques the community, he used the pronoun, “we” as he stated, “*We are not united,*” and thereby signaled membership within that community, notwithstanding its flaws.

Above I described the meanings of community in terms of space and affiliation for some of these youth; in this next section I describe the community in more physical terms. Both the Columbia Heights and Mt. Pleasants neighborhoods may be characterized as tree lined neighborhoods as well as bustling urban areas. Throughout the time of my fieldwork, I approached the *Centro* at different times of day and usually navigated people traffic of all ages, races, and speaking multiple languages. I often saw young adults with young children. This neighborhood was literally in motion, with people, cars, construction vehicles, music blaring out of windows (usually bachata, meringue,

reggaeton, or rap) and the multilingual chatter of young and old walking down the street. Walking down the street where the Centro was located, I often experienced a steady flow of car and human traffic. On the same street as the Centro was an advocacy organization dedicated to Central American causes, a Catholic church, and 4 story apartment buildings. Two blocks away is a health clinic, founded by a Salvadoran doctor, dedicated to providing quality, low or no cost healthcare for the local immigrant Latino community. Through the following excerpts from my notes, I hope to provide snapshots of the people and rhythms surrounding the Centro.

As I leave the Columbia Heights Metro Station, many teenagers (about 20) accompany me out of the station, along with grown men and women who appear to be returning from work. One man carries a cooler and has a bandana on his head and appears to be a construction worker. There is an empty lot facing me. As I turn the corner to walk the two blocks to the Centro, I see a new CVS across the street. I pass young, some middle aged, and some elder people. I also see toddlers and babies with parents.

This feels like a bustling part of D.C. with the steady people and car traffic. I see mostly black and brown faces. I also pass several apartment buildings and a, *Health Center*. As I approach the The Center I walk about a block under a construction scaffold and wooden overhang. The building across the street is boarded up. This is the only one like this on the block. As I walk into the Centro there is a young man (maybe 17) standing at the gate. He seems to be looking out for someone, as I walk past him, he says something to an acquaintance walking by (I don't hear it) (Fieldnotes, 9.18.2000).

There are a few people standing around the hot dog cart and a little girl is standing by an adult lady clutching her legs. I take a few steps further and see a young woman

approximately 20-25 pushing a carriage with a little baby girl. I also see a man who is thin and looks back behind him several times. I pass two older African American gentlemen chatting. As I approach the The Center, I see a bulldozer pulling out of the alley across from the school. 10.10.2000 (10:30 am)

I experienced the descriptive images above again and again as I conducted my fieldwork and worked and lived in this community over a period of 5 years.

El Centro

As I described earlier in this chapter, multifaceted transnational forces influenced the city and neighborhood that received these youth. *El Centro* (The Center), an important space influenced by these larger forces, also has its own history as an international, transnational, and multiracial place whose staff worked to meet the economic, social service, and educational needs of local Latino/as and other members of the community. The Center's history parallels the history of Latino/as within the District. Its growth is related in part to the astute organizing skills and vision of its leaders, as well as the growing need for institutions that connect immigrant youth and their families to further resources.

I reviewed documents such as past newsletters, newspapers, and reports published by The Center, along with articles published in local newspapers (e.g. The Washington Post and various Spanish language newspapers), and images from The Center's archive, each of which reflected the priorities and philosophy of The Center over the years and collectively allowed me to discern consistencies over the years as well as how The Center has evolved over time.

El Centro was established in 1969 by a group of young Latino/as participating in the D.C. Department of Recreation's *Roving Leaders* program. The Center initially came together as an informal gathering of young people who organized activities for their peers and younger children in the neighborhood. Due to the success and visibility of these initial efforts, in 1970 the Office of Youth Opportunity Services dedicated funds to *El Centro*. For the next five years The Center was funded by the *Office of Youth Opportunity Services*, D.C. Department of Recreation, Neighborhood Planning Council (15th Anniversary Celebration report, June 17, 1984). During this time *El Centro* offered programs such as: acculturation, a community newsletter, courtesy patrols, theater and music workshops, and educational and recreational activities. In 1974 The Center was formally incorporated. During this year, the organization also moved to a three-story house on 15th Street and remained there for twenty four years, until it moved again to a much larger, renovated brownstone around the corner. The 15th Street building is still owned by *El Centro*, but is currently a home for young mothers and is adjacent to an Arts The Center and transitional living home for boys—also programs/facilities run by The Center.

As I read through the various documents produced by The Center and those written about its activities, I saw evidence of The Center as a multi-racial, bilingual place inclusive of Latino/as of various ancestry, African Americans, immigrants and youth and families alike. The transnational dimensions of the community were ever-present as I illustrate later in this section, however there was also a theme of The Center as a place that was inclusive of all racial and cultural groups. The theatre group, LatiNegro was one example of this inclusive spirit. In the early 80s, a time of heightened tensions between

the emerging Latino community and long established African American community in the city at large, members of both groups, who were also active at The Center, came together to raise awareness and a collective sense of place across their respective communities through LatiNegro, a youth theater project. Members of LatiNegro performed scenes depicting some of these tensions in schools and community The Centers throughout the D.C. area and concluded their performances with discussions about race and local politics. LatiNegro was also affiliated with the Centro.

Themes of inclusiveness and inter-connection were also reflected in some of The Center's early publications, such as *El Barrio* (The Neighborhood), a Spanish language newspaper established in 1980 as a youth and adult collaborative effort. Through its images and story topics, *El Barrio* was written for a transnational and culturally diverse community at *El Centro* and its surrounding neighborhoods. For example, the January, 1981 edition¹⁸ of the newspaper included an image of, a paramilitary sequester of Salvadoran refugees at the Honduran border, an article about Puerto Rico with a political cartoon, a *Zodiac* store advertisement proclaiming music from several Latin American countries along with *Diarios* (daily newspapers) from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. Page ten contained a section called *Noticias de Nuestra America* (News from Our America) and a political cartoon about El Salvador and U.S. inter-connections. The paper also included an advertisement for Latino lawyers offering services in: Immigration, Accidents, Divorces, and Divorces out of the country, and another ad seeking young reporters and oral historians. This issue also included an article and illustration with the caption, *Feliz Cumpleaños Martín* (Happy Birthday Martin [Luther King]) and the

¹⁸ The layout and design of this issue was consistent with other editions of this newspaper that I reviewed as was the content in terms of local and transnational issues.

following quote from Dr. King, “La vida y el destino de latinoamerica estan en manos de las corporaciones de EEUU...” (The life and destiny of Latin America is in the hands of the corporations of the United States).

I present the above details to illustrate how from its inception, The Center was responsive to the growing Central American community in the area with an eye toward the transnational dimensions of this population. For example, publishing a Spanish language paper with articles about El Salvador, Honduras, and, “News from Our America,” enabled its participants maintain ties to their home nations, whereas ads for legal services and youth jobs helped participants connect to U.S.-based resources that helped them establish their lives here. And finally, the quote by Dr. King, “The life and destiny of Latin America is in the hands of the corporations of the United States,” symbolized the connections between their home countries and the United States in terms of the powers that be. Thus through efforts such as El Barrio, LatiNegro, and many, many other programs, The Center evolved with an awareness of how members of this community maintained ties to El Salvador as they created a sense of place for themselves within Washington, DC.

In 1998 *El Centro* moved to a newly renovated four-story building, designed for young people in terms of the layout of the space, bright wall colors and the images depicted on the walls. In the basement is a drop-in The Center and full kitchen for youth cooking classes as well as for the many events sponsored by *El Centro*. The first floor has a community room, exhibition space with a local Latino/a history exhibition, and staff offices. On the second floor is the *New Beginnings Charter School*. The third floor has health offices and HIV/AIDS testing. The fourth floor holds staff offices.

During the year of data collection and subsequent years there were several programs sponsored by The Center that encouraged a transnational relationship between the youth in D.C. and Latin America. For example during the first month of my fieldwork *El Centro* hosted a visit by the founders of *Homies Unidos* a non-profit organization in El Salvador dedicated to supporting repatriated Salvadoran youth accused of gang membership and crimes in the United States. The Salvadoran author, Mario Bencastro also visited *El Centro* to speak with youth and discuss his latest novel. During events like these, The Center, often engaged in critical discussions with the speakers. At the events I observed at The Center, the youth asked questions about the presenters' lives, about their transitions between El Salvador and the United States, and about the nature of their work. In addition to some of the texts, the participants of this research read at *New Beginnings*, conversations with the invited speakers for various forums provided them with a context within which to situate their transnational experiences and respective lives in El Salvador and Washington, D.C. In Chapter 5 I will further discuss how these speakers' narratives became "texts" for the student participants of this research.

New Beginnings Charter School

During the time I collected data, I experienced *New Beginnings* as a place with a warm atmosphere and commitment to serving youth positioned at the periphery of the educational system. *New Beginnings (El Empiezo Nuevo)* occupied the second floor of The Center's newly renovated facility. The walls of the hallway were painted bright primary colors and skylights and large windows, which made this a bright educational setting.

Initially the school was developed to meet the needs of young mothers, through a small educational program located above a local bakery on Mt. Pleasant Street. In this nurturing environment, with child care support, young mothers could study and complete their GED. By the time of data collection, this educational program had evolved into a formal school with a full academic program consisting of English, Spanish literacy, computers, Social Studies, math, and GED preparation classes. With its evolution into a formal academic setting, its scope also expanded to serve both males and females and young mothers were no longer the primary student population.

Many of the students who attended the school were recent immigrants who sought out the school to learn English and then transferred to a standard high school; some had the goal of preparing to take the GED, while others had dropped out of traditional public high schools or been expelled for a variety of reasons. Several students had entanglements with the juvenile justice system, and some students had a combination of these experiences.

The Curriculum

The curriculum of the school was organized in terms of content and language level. Instead of grades organized by age, at *New Beginnings* students were organized by level of English ability, with four, “Steps.” Step I was for newcomers, Step II comprised students with basic vocabulary and a basic understanding of English, Step III students were proficient in English and could hold conversations and read and write in English at basic levels, but were not fluent. The majority of Step IV students were Latino/a, and often born in the US, fluent English speakers, and enrolled at *New Beginnings* because they were not successful in traditional public school settings for a variety of reasons. As

I mentioned above, the content of the curricula was organized in terms of English literacy, Spanish literacy, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Technology/Computers. There was no school-wide written curricula, however units were organized in terms of school-wide themes such as immigration. There were also regular faculty meetings where teachers discussed common content themes across their classes and worked to align their teaching across their classes. I also saw a project-based approach in my observations of the English literacy, Spanish literacy, and Social Studies classes. At the end of each quarter the students presented their final projects in front of the entire school community; these presentation days were often followed by school-based celebrations with food and dancing.

The Teachers

Within the focal classroom (both focal teachers shared the same room) the walls were adorned with art posters and students work. An erasable white board took up one wall and tables were arranged in a long donut with chairs on the outer perimeter. The average student: teacher ratio was approximately 12:1, however there was a high level of mobility among students, so a given class often had new students. Within a particular month, along with the 8 focal students, there could be 5-10 other students who would stay for a week, a month, or a few months. Some left the school to return to work, whereas others left to transfer to other classes within the school or to other schools all together.

This study's focal teachers ventured well beyond the communities of their birth through out their life journeys. Nathaniel, the students' English teacher, was raised in Iowa and attended a progressive liberal arts college in the state of Washington. He is of European descent, a middle class background, and at the time of data collection, he was

25 years old and lived in Mt. Pleasant. Therefore, he often had stories of running into students on the weekends as they sold food on the street or ran their errands. He learned Spanish as a second language and spoke it proficiently, though his students enjoyed teasing him about his pronunciation. He also sustained contacts with friends in the Dominican Republic, a place he visited on occasion. Prior to teaching high school students, he taught English to adult students who were also migrants from various Latin American countries.

Ernesto was born in Argentina and had only recently moved to the United States in part due to economic conditions in Argentina and in part to support his wife's career goals. He was Spanish dominant and rarely spoke English. Ernesto led a transnational life, but unlike the students he had the cultural capital associated with a college education and a career in education in Argentina. He flew back and forth between D.C. and Argentina to visit with family and maintain professional ties. At the time of the study he was in his early 40s and by the end of the data collection year he returned to Argentina with his family to take a job with the Argentinean government. In many ways he was a public intellectual and studied globalization and literature, topics we often discussed in the lunch room. He was in the process of completing his Master's thesis when I first met him and at times we spoke about our respective projects.

Thus in different ways, both teachers had transnational dimensions to their life stories. Nate through his experiences traveling, learning Spanish, and dedicating himself to teaching within and a DC Salvadoran context. By contrast, life circumstances brought Ernesto to the U.S., his life in this context was constantly influenced by his contact with his home country.

Ernesto's class.

Since Ernesto taught his class in Nate's classroom, the physical space of the two teachers was the same. A typical Spanish class began with the students seated around the table with their photocopied books¹⁹ in front of them. They took turns reading a page or two out loud, periodically Ernesto prompted them to consider the content and meaning of particular scenes. He regularly, though not every class period, asked the students to pause their reading and wrote dates, timelines, names and places on the board to further situate particular scenes in a historical context. Thus he encouraged a historical reading of fictional texts and periodically shared with me that he wanted students to learn how to think beyond the current moment. It was often during this practice of discussing the historical context of a given scene that students offered their own experiences and memories. I will discuss this at greater length with data exemplars in Chapter 6.

Ernesto also presented the students with texts that were relevant to the students' lived experiences in terms of socioeconomic class and culture. *One Day of Life* and *A Place called Milagros de la Paz*, two of the major novels they read, were set in El Salvador during different time periods. Through these historical novels texts, Ernesto provided a context for students to move back and forth between the fictional worlds depicted in novels, to concrete factual timelines based on events in their countries of origin and their own personal histories and histories of migration. In the process students called up their own memories of living during and after events described in the book.

Nate's class.

¹⁹ According to Ernesto, at least one of the novels, *Un Dia en la Vida (One Day of Life)* by Manlio Argueta, was not readily available in the United States at the time. Therefore, he ordered a copy from abroad and then made copies for all the students.

Nate's classroom routines consisted of writing the plan for the day on the board along with a journal prompt and a DOL²⁰. I never learned what this acronym stood for during data collection, but during this activity, Nate wrote a paragraph from a student-generated text (e.g. journals, essays, and responses on tests) on the board, with grammatical errors in tact and without names. The students took turns approaching the board and correcting the errors within their peers' writing. In addition, students regularly wrote in journals and corrected the work of peers as opening exercises for discussion. The day-to-day reading and writing activities in Nate's class varied, but might include: role plays in front of the class, reading and simultaneously listening to a book on tape, and/or taking periodic written tests.

Whereas Ernesto could spend months engaging the students in a single novel, Nate varied the novels students read in his class with greater frequency and presented a range of texts. For example, the students read novels, short stories, poetry, song lyrics, *Washington Post* newspaper articles and websites that were a part of class research projects. Many of the novels and short stories depicted young-adult characters who themselves were im/migrants to the U.S. The newspaper articles Nate assigned often had themes relevant to the students' lives as they covered issues such as U.S. immigration policy, current events in El Salvador, and events related to the local Salvadoran community in the D.C. Metro area. In this way, the texts along with Nate's questions opened up spaces for talking and writing about life across different countries. He also scheduled time for students to silently read books of their choosing. In Nate's class students were asked to engage texts in a variety of ways including reading aloud, writing

²⁰ Daily Oral Language (DOL) is a common practice used in classrooms across the U.S.

questions related to a given text, summarizing texts, writing their opinions and making a variety of presentations based on class readings.

Finally, throughout the year the students had opportunities to interact with various speakers, including teachers from other schools, writers, and community organizers, all of whom led transnational lives in different ways. That is, these were individuals who were themselves born in another country, migrated to the U.S. and continued to maintain strong ties to their countries of origin through a variety of transnational practices. In Nate's class – versus Ernesto's class – the students had more opportunities to contrast what their lives were like in their home countries versus their existing and evolving lives in the District of Columbia. The readings in Ernesto's class provided them multiple opportunities to reflect back in time and space. By contrast, in Nate's class through reading texts about the lives of immigrants and U.S. Latinos and engaging in conversations with elder Latinos who migrated to the U.S. as children, the students had the chance to reflect back and forth in time and space as they positioned themselves in terms of how their lives were in El Salvador compared to their present realities, as well as the narratives of fictional and living personas in the U.S. Thus, in Nate's class the students had ongoing opportunities to reflect back and forth in time and space in terms of Central America, but the focal point of the discussion was often the United States and DC specifically. Whereas, in Ernesto's class, they reflected back in time and space and focused more on understanding what life was like over there and back then.

The Students

The majority of the students who participated in this research were Salvadoran immigrants. They ranged in age from 14-22 and migrated to the U.S. between the ages of

7 and 19. The personal histories of these young-adults were distinct from older generations who emigrated in the 1980s, many of whom left to escape political persecution. Therefore, their childhoods were framed by the context of countries at war or recovering from wars, while adolescence was framed by the economic and cultural influences of the United States (Rodriguez, 2002). Most of the students were from rural communities with little formal schooling in El Salvador and several had already dropped out of school in the United States during their early adolescence. At the time of my fieldwork they were returning to school as older teenagers. Therefore, for many, their academic abilities were at an elementary level, yet their critical thinking facilities were well developed as a result of migrating to the United States, establishing themselves and/or families, and navigating life in this new context.

The focal students were selected as a sample of convenience in that they represented a group that stayed enrolled through the spring of the 2000/2001 academic year. They did, however, represent a cross section of the Salvadoran immigrant youth in this neighborhood along factors such as: educational background, region of origin (e.g. urban vs. rural roots), religious ties, housing/family situation in the U.S. (e.g. group home, independent living, residence with 1 or 2 parents). I explicate some of these points of similarity and differentiation through the following profiles:

José.

At the onset of data collection, José was 16 years old. He grew up in the urban setting of San Salvador and at the age of 15 migrated to Washington, D.C. From journal entries and pre-class discussions, I learned that he liked to go out to clubs on the weekends and dance with friends. He also worked on Saturdays and Sundays as part of a

cleaning crew in an office building near the White House. I am not sure if he also worked after school, however, in one journal entry he wrote about the dilemmas associated with his role as a supervisor. In terms of family, he had two younger brothers who also lived with him and his mother in D.C. Along with dancing, he mentioned going to family parties on the weekends and playing soccer as leisure activities.

Diana.

At the time of data collection Diana was 16 years old and lived with her one-year-old daughter in a group home in southeast D.C. She commuted on the bus and/or metro daily. Her daughter participated in a daycare center near the group home. Diana was originally from the rural state of Usulután, El Salvador. She migrated to the states years after her mother at the age of 12 along with her older sister, Milagros. When she first arrived to the United States, she went to *Public Middle School*. Both girls (her sister was also a participant in the study) wrote in their journals about their memories of El Salvador as children.

Her mother passed away in 1999, the year before I met Diana. Her grandparents and aunt also lived in the D.C. area, and during informal conversations and journal entries, she often mentioned hanging out with her cousins. Diana was the only participant in this study who did not work, although she received funds from the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) federal program.

Milagros.

Milagros, Diana's older sister, was also born in Usulután. She was 19 at the time of data collection and 15 when she migrated to the U.S. She lived with her foster mother in D.C. Milagros also spoke and wrote about a younger brother who lived in El Salvador.

In her interview with me, she talked about wanting to be a nurse. She also worked after school cleaning an office building downtown. In her interview she mentioned her ties to her grandfather who also lived in D.C. at that time. She said that she read the bible at home, did not attend church because she did not have time, but thought about the bible a lot. In El Salvador she used to go to church with her grandfather and they read the bible there.

Yalila.

Yalila, the youngest focal student in the project, was 15 at the time of data collection and 7 when she migrated to the D.C. area. She lived in Columbia Heights with her 5 siblings, mother and step-father. She was the youngest girl in her family and had a younger brother. She also had an older sister she looked up to. At the end of the school year, she wrote about wanting to switch schools and go to a “public school” (versus a charter school). Though she moved to the U.S. at the age of 7, she still had memories of El Salvador. Her mother worked in a salon near the school cutting hair and Yalila was learning how to cut hair during the focal year of the project.

During our interview, she shared that her parents (mother and step-father) moved to the U.S. before herself and her siblings, and worked and sent remittances to them in El Salvador. She was also from a rural town, but never had to work as a child. She also had a very close relationship with the aunt she lived with in El Salvador as a young child. She described this aunt as a second mother. She spoke English with greater comfort and fluency than her peers in the class and was the only focal student who opted to conduct her interview in English.

Luis.

Luis lived in the District as did his mother, though they did not live together. In his journal he often wrote about playing soccer and watching the game on television. He also wrote in his journal about running in Rock Creek Park and named the park as one of his favorite places in DC. The Rock Creek Park extends from Maryland to Washington, D.C. and is characterized by bike paths, trails, and running paths paved alongside the wooded park and a river. Luis was originally from Honduras, though his father was Costa Rican, and he also lived in Costa Rica as a child. During the time of data collection, his daughter and son lived in Honduras. His father passed away when he was a boy. He also switched schools several times in Honduras.

During the time of data collection, he worked at the Pottery Barn on the weekends. In terms of his career aspirations, he said he wanted to be lawyer or work in a union. Karl Marx was one of his favorite writers. He often carried *Selected Writings by Marx* with him to class. One day the binding was falling apart and he carefully glued it together before class.

Sol.

Sol was 22 during the time of data collection and born in El Salvador. Though I do not know if she was born in a rural or urban part of the country, she did attend a university for some time and seemed comfortable navigating the urban areas of her home country including its cultural and educational institutions. She journeyed to the U.S. with her younger brother several years after her parents.

She was a Jehovah's Witness, both in El Salvador and in the United States. She often wrote in her journal about going to the Kingdom Hall (a place of worship) on the weekends as well as preaching on the weekends. On occasion I ran into her with her bible

in hand ready to preach to passersby on 16th Street. Sixteenth Street is a major boulevard roads that extends from Maryland, cuts through DC and ends at the White House.

Reading the bible was an activity she mentioned often as well as that it was the, “constitution of my life,” (Interview, 7.24.2001). On occasion, she also talked about preparing food for activities related to the Jehovah’s Witnesses. In El Salvador she had attended college for a year before migrating to the U.S. Her boyfriend remained in El Salvador.

When she first arrived to the U.S. she obtained a job, with the help of her father, cleaning one of the local office buildings. During her interview, she talked about working afterschool at a job she termed, “easy.” At this job she worked primarily with African Americans and Ethiopian immigrants and when talking about what “community” meant to her, said that this setting and its members was one of her “communities.”

Sofia.

Sofia was 16 when I first met her. She lived with her mother and younger sister in Washington, D.C. Her sister was disabled, though I never learned how so. She liked to go dancing on the weekends at a place in Virginia called Cecilia’s. Sofi also worked as a part-time cleaner in an office building downtown. Like many of her peers, her mother’s arrival to the U.S. preceded her own, though I am not sure by how many years. From journal entries, she indicated that her mother left El Salvador because her sister (Sofi’s aunt) “disappeared.”

Xiomara.

Xiomara was 20 when I first met her. She arrived to the US at age 14 having completed the journey from her rural home state of Santa Ana to Washington, D.C. She

was turned back at the U.S.:Mexico border at her first attempt. She traveled alone, with the help of a coyote. Upon her arrival to the U.S., her mother had been living in the U.S. for several years and sent money to Xiomara, her two younger sisters, and their grandmother in El Salvador. Her sisters followed her some time later.

She attended *Traditional DC Public High School*, about a mile from *New Beginnings*, which she described as an unsafe place where fights broke out there and eventually she left the school. When she first got to the U.S., she worked with her mother selling *pupusas*²¹ on Mt. Pleasant Street at first, and later married. When I met her, she had ended that relationship, was attending *New Beginnings*, and working at a local bakery after school. It seemed that she was making a new start with her life. She lived with her two younger sisters and mother in an apartment near the school and off Columbia Road.

During the period of data collection for this study, she often wrote in her journal about selling *pupusas* with her mother and sisters. They sold food and *atol* from a stand they set up outside the laundromat on Mt. Pleasant Street most every weekend, as well as many mornings during the school week. This meant that they often arose at 3 or 4 in the morning to make the *pupusas* and *tamales* and then sold them to people, mostly men, en route to work. They made it to school by 9am. Her earnings from selling food on the street went to help support her household (with her mom and sisters) and sometimes to support relatives in El Salvador and/or bring them here to the U.S. At the time of data collection, Xiomara also shared with me that her mother was saving money to buy a house in El Salvador. At times I ran into her and her sisters on the weekends and we talked as I ate a *pupusa* and they intermittently conducted transactions and chatted with

²¹ Pupusas are tortillas stuffed with cheese, beans, and/or meat and are typical to El Salvador.

their customers. They seemed to know a lot of people in the community as several people stopped to buy food, chat and/or say hello during the 15 or so minutes we were talking on any given weekend day.

Xiomara also liked dancing on the weekends with friends. This was another popular topic in her journal entries. During our interview, she talked about helping her mom, about the importance of literacy and learning English so she can help her mother with official documents. She also spoke about the importance of the bible in her life. She specifically cited Psalm 91 as very important to her.

Conclusion

The young people who participated in this research experienced transnational processes within their classroom, through the memories they invoked, their interpretations, and the texts they read and drew from in class. However, these interpretations came about by living within a given physical, social, educational, and historical context. Therefore, throughout this chapter I have presented an overview of the context of this study, beginning with the macro historical context of El Salvador – the country of emigration for most of the participants in this study and then spiraling to the context of their reception at the city, neighborhood, youth center, classroom levels.

As migrants the youth who participated in this study left a particular social, political and economic space that was mediated by living in an urban versus rural space and the socioeconomic status of their families. Thus their histories of migration were situated within larger transnational forces – from above [e.g. a shifting export economy in El Salvador] and from below [e.g. the remittances of their family members that allowed them to migrate to the U.S.]. Finally, the context of these youth's lives and classroom

learning was influenced by ongoing transnational dynamics and at the same time they were young people coming into adulthood in D.C. as workers, mothers, daughters, sisters, students, members of various communities including communities of association through work and religious communities. They were young people who liked to dance, hang out with friends, some liked to talk about politics, and all of these identities and ways of experiencing the world were influenced by this larger transnational social field that permeated most aspects of their lives.

In Chapter 5, I examine how these youth experienced transnationalism in terms of day-to-day practices and more ephemeral ways of knowing and framing their lives and identities.

CHAPTER 5

EXPERIENCING TRANSNATIONALISM AND MAKING MEANING THROUGH A SOCIAL FIELD

Introduction

Wind tugging at my sleeve
feet sinking into the sand
I stand at the edge where earth touches ocean
where the two overlap
a gentle coming together
at other times and places a violent clash (Anzaldua, 1987:1).

* * *

When you cross the border you know you can die
or you can lose one leg because there are so many dangers.
You have to confront the fear in the face
and make your dreams come true. –W.
Faces of Courage exhibition, *El Centro*, Washington, DC, 2005

Anzaldua's quote acts as a metaphor for how the participants of this project experienced transnationalism in their day-to-day lives. "The edge where earth touches ocean," a contact zone, symbolizing how these students were rooted in between nation-states in ways that were sometimes subtle and gentle, as in the relationships between their North American teachers and themselves. At other times a violent clash was evident as in the stark architecture of the downtown buildings they cleaned as part-time workers, set against their memories of the rural towns of their childhoods. The feet sinking in the sand evokes a sense of rootedness, while sand, versus solid earth signals the instability the

students contended with due to their uncertain immigration status, and families divided by national borders and constrained economic circumstances.

The second quote, the words of a student from *New Beginnings*, reflects his experience of transnational migration as one of confronting fears and physical risks with the hopes of creating a new life. Many of the youth who were a part of this research also saw this journey and new life in terms of basic needs and survival. As Luis said, regarding a character in a novel the class was reading, “She is a newcomer in the U.S. and that means that she is an immigrant without any family in the U.S. She is a poor person. Only rich people from Latin America come to the United States legally,” (written artifact, 2000).

Thus for the young participants of this study, the meaning of transnationalism was framed by larger global-structural forces, in this case how income and status – being rich versus poor shapes immigrant status, along with an awareness of their own social class positioning across national borders. In this chapter, I discuss how these youth experienced transnationalism through a series of concrete practices they engaged with relatives, friends, and members of their communities throughout the Salvadoran/Central American diaspora. Through this discussion, I focus on the following major research question:

- 1.) In what ways do young adult, Salvadoran/Central American migrants experience transnational dynamics in their day-to-day lives and personal biographies?

I use the term *transnational experiences* to refer to those activities student-research participants engaged within the United States to sustain connections with El

Salvador/Central America²². Following Faulstich-Orellana and colleagues (2004), I argue that these youth participated in a *transnational social field* situated in-between the United States and El Salvador (or their home country) by engaging concrete practices and activities with their countries of origin (see also Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc, 1994; Chavez, 1994). This field was important to the youth in terms of their material survival as well as their subjectivities as people with roots in one place yet residence in another. And yet this *field* was by no means a panacea. As Luis' words above suggest, these youth were acutely aware of their subject positions as working class peoples in both national spaces. Thus, in the pages that follow I present an analysis of the complex transnational dynamics that so often shaped the experiences and ways of knowing of the youth who participated in this project. In framing this chapter, I make three major assertions.

- 1.) Young-adults generated material and knowledge-based resources through the transnational practices they engaged with members of their social networks.
- 2.) In the process of engaging ongoing transnational practices associated with vital resources in their lives, these youth made meaning of their lives in transnational terms.
- 3.) As these youth made meaning of their lives, they invoked dual frames of reference. This dual frame of reference was an important source of knowledge in their lives.

Throughout this chapter, I argue that as youth maintained these vital transnational networks, they made meaning of day-to-day events in their D.C context, often in

comparison to their Salvadoran context. Through their social networks with Salvadorans/Central Americans throughout the diaspora, these youth gained and generated resources that may be thought of as capital. I use the term *social capital* to refer to the resources my participants claimed through relationships with significant others connected to societal institutions (Bourdieu, 1986; Dika and Singh, 2002; Stanton-Salazar, 2004). While at times their networks were not directly connected to institutions of power, they still gleaned important resources from these relationships.

The transnational social fields of these youth also offered them a context within which to acquire particular habits of mind as they noted the contrasts in-between national contexts, and developed critiques within and across these settings. In this first section I examine students' meaning making within their transnational social fields while discussing the pivotal life event of crossing the border between Mexico and the United States. Next I present an analysis of how these youth positioned themselves and made meaning of their lives through the transnational economic practices of their lives. In the final section of this chapter I examine how these youth also made meaning of their lives in terms of the information and knowledge-based transactions enacted within the transnational social field of their lives.

Navigating Transnational Social Networks: Border Crossings

Perhaps the most salient example of a transnational experience for these students and their families was traversing the approximately 4000 miles between San Salvador (or their rural home towns) and Washington, D.C. and crossing the multiple borders along the way. Some made it across the border the first time, while others were turned back by the authorities in Mexico or the United States and arrived to U.S. soil the second or third

time they tried. Xiomara, Milagros, and Diana made the journey to the U.S. through a combination of buses, riding through Latin America and then a plane ride from California or Texas to Washington, D.C. Others, like Yalila, and Sol, had their documents secured by family members ahead of time and arrived to D.C. after 2-3 long plane rides, yet a far less taxing trip than some of their peers. Still others, like Gabriel, José, Sofia and Luis literally walked and/or swam across the border between the U.S. and Mexico after taking a combination of buses and trains from El Salvador and Honduras respectively. The physical, embodied experience of crossing the border between the U.S. and Mexico was also a point of reference that most of the students shared due to their own experiences or that of their parents.

When students made the journey from El Salvador to the United States, they certainly drew from their social networks in order to make the journey. However, they also made an important transition in terms of the social fields of their lives. Through this journey they moved from being the receiver of resources in the transnational circuits of their lives to the generators and receivers of resources. They may or may not have been aware of this shift, however they were aware of this journey as a pivotal life experience. Through the following data exemplars, I illustrate what this event meant to them and their family members and in the process how they positioned themselves in terms of their border crossings. In the first two excerpts, the students were responding to Nate's journal prompt asking them to describe a border, literally and in terms of their experience.

“Journal”

I think a border is a fence. The people crossed to another place or country that they want to live in. We have a border to separate the places or countries.

“My experience”

My experience crossing the border looked like a fence or a river that almost everybody who immigrated had to cross. I passed the border between Mexico and the United States. It was half hard and half easy because I crossed the border with my sister and my uncle we crossed the border by raft.

*How long did it take you to cross?*²³

It took me to crossed – 1 months.

(Sofi, Written artifact, 9/24/00)

The following two excerpts are based on an assignment the students were given by Nate to interview someone about their journey across the border. Below the Diana and Xiomara reflected on the assignment in their journals.

When I was doing Gabriel interview I was feeling like the same thing when I crossed the border.

(Written artifact, Diana, 10/31/00)

So, when I wrote the journey about my sister I felt sensitive and I said to her your journey is more difficult than mine because she had a very bad experience. So I said to her I wish you didn't have that bad experiences. So I feel sensitive for my sister. I love my sister.

(Written artifact, Xiomara, 10/31/00)

The above excerpts exemplify how these youth shared their experiences of crossing this border (theirs, their families or their compatriots) within an inter-connected

²³ Italics indicate Nates' written questions to the student.

framework. Through the above utterances they alluded to a collective sense. As Diana was listening to Gabriel she was “feeling” her own experience. Similarly, Xiomara seemed to ache for her sister as she wrote about the process of interviewing her sister about her journey. According to Sofi, “almost everybody who immigrated had to cross.” It is not clear if Sofi was referring to all immigrants or all the people she saw as part of her journey, yet her phrasing signals a collective experience undergone by “immigrants.”

Some of the youth indexed their border crossing experience in terms of the toll the journey took on their bodies. Xiomara also shared with me that she was almost molested the first time she tried to cross. She was 13 at the time and was traveling alone with the assistance of a *coyote*²⁴. Xiomara also talked about riding buses for days, only to be turned back at the Mexican border.

Sol did not physically cross the border by walking across various national borders; she and her brother flew on a plane. She writes about the journey as follows during a free writing exercise for Ernesto’s class. In this assignment he asks them to describe their journey to the United States and encouraged them to just write and not worry about spelling or punctuation.

<p>...abordamos otro avion para llegar a Washington, D.C. donde nuestros padres nos esperaban anciosios y con deseos de empezar nuestra nueva vida en este pais en donde los 4 trabajamos duro para cuando</p>	<p><i>...we boarded another plane to arrive in Washington, D.C. where our parents waited for us anxiously and with desires to start our new life in this country where all 4 of us work hard for when we return to El</i></p>
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²⁴ People who assist migrants to cross the border for a fee are known as “coyotes.” Sometimes coyotes act as honorable guides who lead migrants along the “safest” routes and make arrangements for food and water along the way. However coyotes are also notorious for charging exorbitant fees and exploiting the vulnerabilities of those who seek their services.

<p>volvamos a El Salvador [para] disfrutar de vacaciones...</p> <p>Written Artifact, Sol, 2.6.2001</p>	<p><i>Salvador to enjoy our vacation.</i></p>
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Thus in the above excerpt, she frames her journey in terms of loss and a sense of returning to El Salvador someday. As I read through the students' multiple references to crossing the border and the meaning of migrating to the United States within my fieldnotes, transcripts, and the students' writings, the themes of: separation of families, a sense of anticipation, and equally a sense of returning one day were present for all the students. It so happens that Sol captures all these sentiments in the above exemplar. When she writes about her families', "desires to start our new life in this country where all 4 of us work hard..." she simultaneously locates herself and her life within her receiving nation and in home country, "for when we return to El Salvador to enjoy our vacation." All of the students spoke to this sense of duality in their lives in terms of national spaces throughout the year. In the pages that follow I will continue to present the patterns within this articulated sense of duality.

It may be that while walking across the physical borders between El Salvador and the United States or riding the hours and hours on buses and trains, or flying the 12 hours between El Salvador and Washington, D.C., traveling for weeks, or using a combination of these modes of transportation, embedded the seeds of a transnational awareness that they referred to, drew from, and often times framed their experiences in the United States. This awareness became a shared experience that signaled survival, perhaps

resilience, and a sense of purpose that the students called upon as they faced present-day challenges.

It was by crossing the border that these youth first gained entry into the United States and it was the first practice they engaged to move through transnational circuits. To make the journey, most of the youth relied on their social networks in the United States to acquire the capital and social/navigational support necessary for their month(s) long journey. However, once they arrived in the U.S. their participation within their transnational social fields was more dynamic. At times they offered resources (e.g. sending remittances home), while at other times they gained resources (e.g. friendship and information gleaned through online interactions) within the transnational practices of their lives. In this next section I explore some of the ongoing transnational practices and experiences of the youth and resulting resources and meanings for those who participated in this study.

Drawing from Material and Knowledge Funds through Transnational Experiences

In the following pages, I focus on how these youth positioned themselves in terms of the back and forth transnational practices they engaged to sustain their lives and evolve transnational social fields. Thus in the analysis that follows, I discuss how youth experienced transnationalism in terms of their social networks and related resources. I also discuss the meanings of those experiences for them as I explore how they positioned themselves as particular kinds of people within the transnational fields of their lives. Related to social capital—that is, the resources these youth claimed through relationships with those connected to societal institutions (Bourdieu, 1986; Dika and Singh, 2002; Stanton-Salazar, 2004), I use the term knowledge funds (Moll and Greenberg, 1990; Moll

and Gonzalez, 2001, Velez-Ibáñez and Greenberg, 1992; 2005) to refer to the social networks of youth and the strategic information they gleaned from these relationships. Similarly, I use the term material funds to signal the economic resources these youth generated and accessed through their social networks. Thus, the material and knowledge funds of youth enabled them to access and offer economic or knowledge-based resources and sustain their lives and the lives of family members and associates within their social networks. Sometimes these funds were also connected to institutional resources and brought about social capital, and at other times they were not connected, or loosely connected to institutions of power, yet offered resources vital to these youth. As they were accessing and expanding their funds, these youth continued to develop as people and actively situated themselves in terms of their lives in El Salvador, their evolving lives in D.C. and the contrasts in-between. Thus, in the following sections, I discuss students' material funds and knowledge funds in terms of their experiences and the various resources they accessed and enacted within the transnational contexts of their lives. I begin with an examination of the multi-faceted ways that students activated their transnational funds and related subjectivities throughout the Salvadoran diaspora.

Experiencing Transnationalism through Material Funds

Again, *material funds* were comprised of the social networks and relationships which led my research participants to important economic resources in their lives. For example, they maintained relationships with their home countries by wiring a portion of their earnings from part-time jobs to family members in their countries of origin. This economic support helped to sustain family members back home. Therefore, students' transnational material funds comprised relationships maintained across and within the

national boundaries that led to economic resources. Based on my analysis of data, I present exemplars of how youth situated themselves within these economic practices and the meanings they derived from their material funds. One of the most salient economic practices in their lives was the process of sending remittances to their family members and associates in their countries of origin.

In the two years I spent becoming a part of their school community and later living a few blocks away from the school and continuing my contact with students and teachers, it was not uncommon for them to share stories about sending currency to family members in their countries of origin. Most of the youth who participated in this research worked as kitchen helpers in restaurants, cleaners of local buildings, or as part of informal family businesses. Thus, their labor was often invisible and/or marginal. Yet through their earnings, they helped maintain their family's livelihood in El Salvador and the United States. Thus their work (here) facilitated material and social capital (there).

This economic support was a vital facet of maintaining transnational social networks. In their classroom-based writing youth repeatedly mentioned working during weekends and evenings as they responded to journal prompts such as: "What did you do this weekend?" Prior to emigration, these youth participated in the transnational field as receivers of social and material capital (there) and generators of various forms of capital (here), thus work and the associated transactions related to work were part of their lives since they were children and part of how they grew up.

For example, during a class discussion about why people emigrate from El Salvador/Central America, Nate jotted down the following reasons offered by students on the board:

Reasons for emigrating

Better life

- jobs
- education

Earn \$ to send home²⁵

Learn English

Politics

- war
- guerillas make life hard

Education (plan to return)

(Fieldnote, 12.14.00)

Various facets of these youth's histories of migration were apparent in this data excerpt. The phrase, "Earn money to send home," was a sentiment commonly expressed among the youth and referred to the practice of sending remittances to family members in their home countries. In this instance, and in many of their conversations, the comment, "earn money to send home" was woven together with upward mobility aspirations (Better life, jobs, education), language (learn English), politics (war, guerillas make life hard) and education (plan to return). Furthermore, in this summary of their discussion, these youth positioned themselves as people who migrated to the U.S. in terms of the push, pull and in-between dimensions of their transnational social field. That is, they were here because of what they could do for themselves in terms of pull factors such as: education,

²⁵ Bolded for emphasis.

jobs, and learning English. They also migrated due to factors that pushed them away from El Salvador, such as: the war and/or its aftermath, and related politics and to better help those members of their social networks in El Salvador who could not make the journey for whatever reasons. In Chapter 6 I further examine this ongoing, positioning and bifurcation of oneself in terms of how these youth read and interpreted texts.

As further examples of material funds, Yalila and Xiomara each worked in family businesses (formal and informal). Yalila learned to cut hair from her mother who worked in a local salon about four blocks away from *New Beginnings*. Initially the wages of Yalila's mother served to support Yalila as a child in El Salvador. Once Yalila was of age to work (and residing in the U.S.) she was able to take advantage of her mother's local networks and social capital by, for example, learning how to cut hair from her mother, practicing on her brother and uncles, and then obtaining a job at her mother's salon (Yalila interview, 3/22/2001). With her own earnings, Yalila was equipped to engage in the sending end of the transnational labor/remittance circuit. These processes were important facets of how these youth cultivated transnational social fields, and in the pages that follow I further explore how they situated themselves in terms of these practices.

Like Yalila, Xiomara and her two sisters participated in the informal family business of selling pupusas, tamales, and atól early in the mornings before school and on the weekends. Xiomara's journey into the world of paid work was similar to Yalila's in several ways. Her mom migrated to the U.S. first, established a business (Yalila's mom joined a business), earned money, sent for Xiomara, and then Xiomara worked with her mother, earning money to send for her sisters. Eventually, Xiomara also secured her own part-time job as a baker. During informal conversations with her I asked why she worked

in the family business and held a part-time job in the formal labor sector, she said that she kept the earnings from her part-time job, while her earnings from the family business went to support her household and family in El Salvador. Finally, the food they make and sell have intersecting cultural and transnational associations.

While pupusas and tamales are typical foods in El Salvador and the girls and their mother learned how to make these foods *there*. During a recent conversation with Xiomara (12/16/2006), she shared that her mother did not cook all that much when they all lived in El Salvador nor did she have the food selling business there, however her mother came up with the idea of selling food on the street from seeing businesses like this in their hometown. Therefore, the act of making and selling food in DC had cultural, class, and transnational nuances. Pupusas are typical to El Salvador and thus an artifact of their local culture, however in the case of her mother, actually making pupusas did not become a regular part of her life until she arrived in the U.S. and realized that she could make more money and have flexible work hours by starting her own business. The business itself had transnational nuances in that Xiomara's mom called up the idea of her business from El Salvador, and was successful due to the ongoing migration of Salvadorans/Central Americans and their desire for traditional foods. And finally, their earnings from this business went toward supporting the migration, initially of Xiomara, then a year or so later of her two sisters, and then other family members. Xiomara once remarked to me that she was frustrated that she and her sister had to work particularly hard during the past month to raise enough money to bring one of her uncles who she did not particularly like. Xiomara, her mother, and her sisters were thus part of creating a receptive environment for new migrants. Finally, through her journal entries, Xiomara

positioned work-and specifically making and selling pupusas, tamales and atól as an ongoing part of her life along side going out with friends and dancing.

While Yalila and Xiomara, like many of their peers, may not have mentioned the transnational dynamics of their labor, nor did they situate themselves transnationally in each utterance about work, however work was an ongoing theme of discussion and writing in this educational setting. What is more, their work and earnings were part of transnational remittances to family members. Therefore, I present the above examples from Yalila and Xiomara's lives to illustrate how these circuits were activated through multiple aspects of their lives. I also seek to demonstrate the ongoing, everyday, mundane nature of work for them. In a similar and related way, the transnational context of their lives – El Salvador and comparisons to their past lives (there) – were omnipresent even if not always spoken.

As I stated earlier, the youth who participated in this study did not raise these conversations everyday; their mention of remittances was casual, almost as if it was an assumed part of life for them in the United States. It is also important to note that these conversations and informal utterances took place within a city where millions of dollars are sent from Salvadorans and other Central American migrants to their countries of origin to support their families and communities (Pedersen, 2005). Sometimes remittances took the form of wiring money to relatives in one's hometown and sometimes it took the form of sending actual goods.

What is more, the practice of working to support oneself, family from one's ancestral home, and family members in the United States occurred within a global economic context where resources were distributed inequitably. And students alluded to

that inequality at times. For example, in the following fieldnote excerpt, Milagros described how she *acquired* office supplies from her employer and distributed them to friends in the class as well as people back “home.” As she described this incident to her teacher and her classmates, she implicitly positioned herself within a transnational social field and as someone who provided resources.

Milagros pulls out a highlighter and says she got it from work. Several students have the same one.

Edgar asks if she stole them for everyone.

Milagros says, “no they throw them away. Yesterday they threw away 3 boxes of pencils.”

She pulls a pencil out of her bag, “See.”

Ernesto asks, “Que opinas de eso?” (What’s your opinion about that?)

Milagros talks about how *she brings the stuff they throw away to send home,*” to give to people who need it”²⁶.

One day there were all these “pennies” in the garbage, “¡Pero un monton de ‘pennies!’” (But a whole bunch of pennies!)

Ernesto asks, “Que es ‘pennies?’” (What are ‘pennies?’)

Milagros replies, “Centavos.”

She continues to explain how she brought her supervisor over to see the pennies in the garbage.

Her tone of voice is that of disgust and disbelief (Fieldnote, 3.15.2001)

²⁶ My emphasis.

Although this exemplar was a singular event, that is, none of the other students mentioned sending supplies to family members in their home countries, it is nevertheless important in exemplifying the distinctions Milagros made between how people lived “back home” and how people lived in D.C. When Milagros spoke about sending these supplies home, “to people who need them,” she signaled the unequal relationship between herself and her family back home versus the people who worked in that building during the day. In different ways, all of these youth spoke to or alluded to this unequal dynamic throughout the year I spent with them. What is more, as Milagros continued to describe the “surplus” in her work setting, she voiced a sense of disbelief and disgust that people in this country could actually throw money away.

While she did not explicitly state a critique in this particular excerpt, at other times she positioned herself as someone who was working class and marginalized as a part-time worker. In the United States’ context Milagros had a lower socioeconomic status as someone who cleaned office buildings at night to support herself and family members back “home.” In the context of her work life, she experienced inequality by accumulating the surplus “garbage” thrown away by the day workers, for herself, her classmates, and her family and acquaintances in El Salvador. Milagros subverted the power dynamic and resisted participating in the waste of resources by redistributing these supplies locally and internationally. Since her social networks extended across national boundaries, her role as provider occurred within D.C. (giving highlighters to friends in school) and toward El Salvador (sending supplies to people “who need them”).

This theme of inequitable relations between El Salvador and the U.S. (and working class Salvadorans and middle/upper class North Americans within the U.S.)

arose in class discussions and informal discussions I had with the students time and again. In the following exemplar, written up during a school-wide assembly featuring a guest speaker, one of Milagros' peers also alluded to the inequities many of the students experienced in both national spaces. The speaker, Mateo, was white, of European descent and grew up in Ohio, but at the time lived in El Salvador and worked with deported Salvadoran-American ex-gang members (see Zilberg, 1999 for a further analysis of deported youth). He was at the *Centro* as part of a fundraising and awareness-raising trip:

<p>Mateo habla sobre El sueño Americano y que la sociedad tiene que cambiar. Va a ser igual.</p> <p>Dice, “Espero que Ustedes no esta aquí solamente para mejorar su vida solamente. Pero para formar una comunidad bien fuerte.”</p> <p>Un estudiante dice que, “Hay muchas oportunidades aquí...si hay, pero nosotros no los acercamos. Encontramos los peores trabajos.”</p>	<p><i>Mathew talks about the American Dream and that the society has to change. It's going to be equal.</i></p> <p><i>He says, “I hope that you all are not here just to improve your own lives, but to form a very strong community.</i></p> <p><i>One of the students says,</i></p> <p><i>“There are a lot of opportunities here...indeed there are, but we do not attain them. We find the worst jobs...”</i></p> <p><i>(Fieldnote, 9/27/00)</i></p>
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In the above brief exchange, the speaker contested the individualistic narrative of mobility (a.k.a the American Dream) (*I hope that you all are not here just to improve your own lives*) and proposed a counter communal narrative (*to form a very strong community*). The student in turn countered his perspective as he recognized that the

opportunities the speaker referred to, were not equitably distributed (*There are a lot of opportunities here...indeed there are, but we do not attain them*), based on his experience as a working class Salvadoran/Central American migrant (*We find the worst jobs...*). His ideas were premised on his experiences living with the transnational labor dynamics of his (and his peers) life.

At another level, this young man's comments, along with the incident Milagros discussed in class exemplified the uneven economic structures between the urban context of D.C. and rural towns-the points of emigration for most of the students. Within this disparity, the lowest level jobs in D.C. allowed young people like Milagros and her classmates to not only earn a living but to support their families back home. Thus, Milagros worked in that building due, in part, to larger global (economic and political) forces that pushed her mother and eventually her away from her hometown, but she also acted as a transnational conduit by accumulating surplus resources and wages and sending them back "home." The student's comment in the above example illustrates how students were acutely aware of their own marginality within the local labor market. Within the transnational fields of their lives, they became the wealthier members of their transnational-familial networks to El Salvador as they acquired economic capital within a global economy that allowed them to provide resources.

In the prior examples, Milagros and her classmate were on the sending end of remittances within a stratified economic context. In this next excerpt, Yalila described what it meant for her to be on the receiving end of these remittances when she lived in El Salvador. She was born there and lived there until the age of seven. As she described this aspect of her personal history, she indexed herself within a rural: urban frame in El

Salvador. As a young child living in El Salvador her mother and stepfather lived in the U.S. and sent remittances to her. In the following excerpt from her interview she described the meaning of these remittances (then and now). Throughout this exemplar, I mark the past and present tense in parenthesis to highlight how Yalila went back and forth in time and space in her response to my question.

But I know some people that work over there in farms and everything. (present)²⁷
I didn't ever know how to do that. (past)
And they probably think that just because I live in the city *I am trying to be all that.*
(present)
But that's not, that's not-I mean I don't feel that way. (present)
They probably see it that way (present) because I've never done that [work on farms] or anything. (past)
But I tell them that, (present)
'I probably couldn't do it because I had my Dad and my Mom here, they were helping me, they were sending me money and whatever I needed over there, so I didn't have to work.' (past)
(Yalila, Interview, 3.22.2001)

In this excerpt, Yalila situated herself in terms of concrete practices such as remittances as well as the meaning of those economic resources as a young child living in an urban setting in El Salvador and as a teenager living in D.C. What is more, Yalila positioned herself in terms of the transnational social field of her life as someone who received

²⁷ Past and present tense are marked for emphasis.

resources (in the past and in El Salvador) (I had my Dad and my Mom here, they were helping me, they were sending me money and whatever I needed over there, so I didn't have to work.'). yet who was not an inherently better person (there and then AND here and now) (And they probably think that just because I live in the city *I am trying to be all that*. But that's not, that's not-I mean I don't feel that way. They probably see it that way because I've never done that [work on farms]).

Within the above utterances she framed her own transnational reality and that of her family with a sense of duality, as well as the social class dynamics she attributed to this transnational social field. That is, when she spoke of her peers' perceptions – they probably think she is “all that” (conceited or better than those who worked on farms), because she lived in the city, she referred to status differences between rural and urban dwellers within El Salvador. She was also conscious of the transnational economic conditions that brought about her relative status in El Salvador. In other words it was not because she was a better person (a perspective embedded in an individualist ideology), it was because her parents were able to earn wages in the U.S. and send them to her that she was able to enjoy this relative privilege as a child.

Finally, within this excerpt she spoke to her experience by referring back and forth in time and space and thus signaled the spatial and temporal nature of this particular social field. Furthermore, she shifted back and forth to argue her point and draw evidence from her life, implied by her words was the idea that a lot of kids did work in El Salvador if they were not receiving remittances. It was through living in the U.S. and getting to know youth like Milagros, that Yalila became aware of her own social position vis-a-vi

her peers. She developed this social class awareness, in part by comparing and contrasting what life was like to what life is like in the two spaces.

Through her responses to my interview questions, it was as if she was proving a point to her peers in her current life, but who were symbolically present in her past as rural workers she never knew. Thus, she projected her experiences within the transnational field of her life in terms of a rural: urban dichotomy and was aware of how those socioeconomic dynamics influenced the life she had (there) and who she has become (here). This awareness became part of how she positioned herself vis-à-vis her peers in the present in D.C. as well as in the past in El Salvador. By thinking about how she was positioned there, through learning from her peers here, she situated her past and present experiences within this larger transnational field. In the above example Yalila also articulated an awareness of her relative privilege as a child due to the larger transnational economic practices of her parents.

Part of how these youth positioned themselves within this transnational field also had to do with how they positioned themselves vis-a-vis family members. That is, related to economic practices were the family dynamics brought about by parents' decisions to emigrate in search of work to support their families. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, often the economic and political situation in the home countries of these youth prompted their parents' migration to the U.S. first, leaving the youth and their siblings in their home region/country to be cared for by extended family members. Therefore, their parents' migration to the U.S. was prompted by economic and political circumstances that these youth experienced as remittances and parenting from grandparents and aunts. It was often not until years later that their parents were able to send resources to bring the youth to the

U.S. These migration patterns were initiated by economic constraints in their countries of origin and sustained by economic remittances sent from parents. In these scenarios, youth were positioned between the United States and El Salvador before they even got to D.C. They were rooted in their home nation, yet looking toward another and anticipating a life in a new place for years at a time. Yalila spoke about this in terms of family relationships:

T: Who took care of you when you were there?

Y: My grandparents.

T: Are they here now?

Y: Yeah they are here now. And my aunt.

T: You were close to her too?

Y: Yeah. I felt her like my mom. I mean she is my real mom ‘cuz I was like most of my life with her. But I love my mom too.

(Interview, Yalila, 3/22/2001)

Due to the transnational circumstances of her life, brought about by the economic needs of her family, Yalila had two maternal figures. Her words in this excerpt reflected the back and forth vantage points these young people drew from to make sense of their lives. In these brief utterances, it seemed important for Yalila to claim her aunt as her mom, “Yeah. I felt her like my mom. I mean she is my real mom cuz I was like most of my life with her. But I love my mom too.” As she assumed this stance to affirm her aunt’s maternal place in her life, she situated herself within her transnational social field in terms of the past (Yeah. I felt her like my mom), present (I mean she is my real mom), past (‘cuz I was like most of my life with her), and present (But I love my mom too). In

this context, the resource Yalila gained within the transnational field of her life was the love of two maternal figures. However, her words also alluded to the sacrifices families endure by separating from their children for long stretches of time in order to assure their material well-being. I choose the above excerpts from Yalila's interview because she so clearly articulated the sense of looking back and forth and how her life was situated in-between two national spaces. She may well have been acutely aware of this duality because she migrated when she was 7 and literally spent half of her life in one space and half in the other and at *New Beginnings* was constantly asked to examine her life alongside the lives of her peers. However, all of her peers, in one way or another, voiced a sense of a back and forth existence through the year of data collection and thus her words are truly exemplars of an ongoing theme in this setting.

In sum, by moving to the U.S., working at low-wage/low status jobs in the D.C./U.S. context, while maintaining direct ties to their countries of origins, these youth and their parents provided material resources that assisted their loved ones in Central America. As they engaged in day-to-day acts to maintain ties and provide support, they tapped social capital as generators and receivers of resources. They also developed dual frames of reference in the process.

Therefore, part of how these young people situated themselves within this social field was by drawing from and contributing to these material funds through ongoing economic practices with members of their social networks in the U.S. and their countries of origin. In the process of enacting these transactions, the students situated themselves in terms of the economic situation in their home countries versus that of the U.S. They also situated themselves in terms of related family dynamics. This meant that they did not

position themselves in terms of their economic status in the U.S., nor El Salvador, but rather through the back and forth social and material capital, associated family relationships, and ways of knowing between the two spaces in the past and present. These positionings have implications not only for how they compared and contrasted the actual places of their lives, but who they were/are in-between each space. Within the contrasts they gained an awareness of El Salvador relative to the U.S., as well as themselves within each space. Finally, as they, for example, compared and contrasted various elements of their lives and issued critiques, they made sense of their lives in ways that could be activated in academic contexts as part of teaching analytical approaches to narrative and expository texts.

Experiencing Transnationalism through Knowledge Funds

Whereas the material funds of these youth brought about *socioeconomic* resources for them as well as an awareness of how they were positioned within a transnational social field, knowledge funds (or funds of knowledge) had value due to the bodies of strategic information youth gained or generated from those relationships. That is, knowledge funds were comprised of the social networks that yielded information with strategic value in the lives of youth (see for example: Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti, 2005). While knowledge funds may have also yielded cultural capital at times, there are important socioeconomic differences between the two constructs. Social and cultural capital usually refers to relationships and knowledge that connect youth to institutional resources, whereas funds of knowledge refer to vital bodies of information that youth acquire within their working class social networks that *could* have value in their school lives. However, knowledge funds do not necessarily have the same symbiotic connection

to school knowledge as the relationship between cultural capital and academic ways of knowing.

In the context of this study, the relationships youth maintained within D.C. and through out the Salvadoran diaspora were analogous to a bank account. At times they deposited knowledge into their networks (e.g. they conveyed information that helped sustain and inform loved ones in their country of origin), whereas at times they accessed new understandings through these relationships (e.g. learning about Australian topography by “chatting” online with another young Salvadoran migrants residing in Australia). In this next section, I discuss how the knowledge funds of youth were tapped and renewed as they engaged transnational communication practices and global media. In turn, they gained strategic information that at times also served as cultural and social capital within their lives. Finally, I also analyze how these youth made meaning of their own lives and positioned themselves in terms of their transnational knowledge funds (see also Sánchez, 2007).

Communication practices.

Through communication practices such as sending letters and e-mails and making phone calls, youth stayed in touch with their family activities and the local events in their countries of origin. This networking was an important aspect of how they maintained connections, generated and received resources within the United States context, and situated themselves in terms of the multiple physical spaces of their lives. One way they situated themselves within the transnational social field, had to do with how they were able to acquire and convey knowledge throughout the Salvadoran (Central American) diaspora. For example, similar to how families transmitted material goods, they

transmitted (and received) information and knowledge across national boundaries to contribute to the lives of family members and to maintain relationships. However, unlike material funds, these youth not only engaged relationships with relatives and people they already knew, they also established new relationships with other Salvadoran and Latin American youth around the world. In the process they maintained and evolved a sense of what it meant to be Salvadoran within the diaspora. Thus they renewed and expanded their framings of their lived experiences in ongoing ways as they situated themselves in terms of the transnational knowledge funds of their lives.

During my interview with Luis, for example, he described how he engaged communication practices in several ways. He mentioned that he liked to talk to his aunts in Honduras and used a phone card to call them. The following response was prompted by the question, “In what ways do you use literacy in your day-to-day life?” At first he said that he read letters to his mother (who also resides in D.C.) because she had trouble with her vision. He also noted that he kept in contact with his children in El Salvador and offered the following:

L: Y a mis hijos les ayudo con la lectura. A saber yo, les ayuda mas...	<i>L: And with my children, I help them with school readings. As I come to know [more], I help them more...</i>
T: Cuantos niños tienes.	<i>T: How many children do you have?</i>
L: Dos.	<i>L: Two</i>
T: Estan aquí?	<i>T: Are they here?</i>
L: No, estan en Honduras.	<i>L: No, they are in Honduras.</i>
T: Pero, mantienes contacto con ellos?	<i>T: But you maintain contact with them?</i>
L: Si	

T: Por escribir—	<i>L: Yes.</i>
L: Escribir y hablar.	<i>T: Writing—</i>
(Interview, Luis, 7/24/2001)	<i>L: Writing and speaking.</i>

Through communication practices like e-mail and phone calls to family, Luis actively sowed the seeds that nourished the transnational field in his life as he maintained his role of father by looking across national spaces on a daily basis. Thus at one level he positioned himself as one who provided literacy resources to family members here in the U.S., as well as in El Salvador. In this excerpt, Luis also described a typical interaction between a father and child—helping with homework—but because of the circumstances of their lives, youth like Luis carried out these “typical” interactions across national boundaries. Thus there was a level of physical distance and intimacy that was suspended as both father and child worked to maintain familial ties.

The dynamic between father and child was similar to economic remittances in two respects. With his phone calls, he conveyed the knowledge he gained in school in D.C., and was a conduit of resources in a similar way that Milagros did with the office supplies and Yalila’s parents did with their remittances to her. There was the transfer of academic resources (his own academic literacy) developed through educational experiences and networks in the United States to his social networks in DC and Honduras As Luis said, “As I come to know [more], I help them more.” Second, even as he was positioned at the edges of the educational system here (in terms of economic class, language, and attendance at an alternative charter school) he was still in a position to be a resource to his son and daughter and recognized his own intellectual resources vis-a-vis his children.

Finally, in the transnational social field, via communication technologies, Luis was able leverage the resources of his receiving nation toward the country of his emigration and in the process he cultivated a dual frame of reference. Although it may be that his knowledge, while useful and helpful to his children, had far less capital than U.S. dollars due to the economy in El Salvador. Even with a formal education, the Salvadoran labor market allows for only limited upward socioeconomic mobility. Nevertheless, this excerpt illustrates one way he provided intellectual resources across national boundaries.

Engaging the internet was another communication practice these youth employed to maintain connections and generate resources. Throughout my time participating in this educational setting, I observed students use the internet for numerous purposes on a daily basis. They surfed the internet to find information about popular musical artists from the United States and Latin America. They went online to send e-cards to friends and letters to family and friends. By the end of the data collection year, all of them had their own e-mail accounts. Using the internet to access information and create and maintain relationships was related to cultural and social capital in several ways, which I explore through the next few examples. In my interview with Luis he discussed communicating with friends online who resided in D.C., New York, Costa Rica and Romania and who had respective origins in Mexico, Honduras, and Romania. His Romanian friend was fluent in Spanish and he met her in a chat room. Sol also had global social networks. In the following interview excerpt, she responded to my question about the ways she uses the internet in her daily life to seek out information and resources related to education, jobs, community, and online friendships. In her own words, it was, “like a caudal” to multiple resources related to information and social capital.

<p>S: El internet? Como mas ventaja porque cuando no puedo comprar un libro o saber algo de un actor, por ejemplo o que quiero informacion sobre trabajo por ejemplo, puedo acudir el internet. Si busco una direccion, me especifica todo lo que yo quiera saber. Por ejemplo en la escuela esta...alli me da horarios, me da para escoger todo lo que quiero saber de un pais. Puedo ir al internet y puedo ver fotos tambien puedo ver discursos en linea, puedo hablar con mis amigas en chat. Puedo mandar cartas, puedo mandar tarjetas. Como un caudal. I don't know how you say in English.</p> <p>(Sol, Interview, 7.24.2001)</p>	<p><i>The internet? It is a great advantage because when I can't buy a book or I want to know something about an actor, for example or if I want information about a job for example I can go on the internet. If I'm looking for an address, it's specific to everything I want to know. For example in school...there it gives me schedules, it gives me all that I would want do know about a country. I can go to the internet and I can see photos, also I can see conversations online, I can speak with my friends in chat rooms. I can send letters, I can send cards. It is like a caudal. I don't know how you say it in English.</i></p>
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In her responses to my question, Sol positioned herself in terms of the internet and alluded to its role in her life as a caudal to resources. Sol's words here also reflected the practices I heard about and observed from many of her classmates. In the prior interview excerpt, Sol situated the internet as vital and positioned herself as one who sought out its resources. She noted how she engaged the internet to access information related to potential employment (*or if I want information about a job for example*), literature

(because when I can't buy a book or I [want] to know something about an actor), educational (in school...there it gives me schedules), and social (I can speak with my friends in chat rooms) resources. Sol's response revealed the different types of resources she gained from the internet as well as the transnational nature of her social networks. Within the transnational field of her life, friendships were made and maintained via an internet "caudal" whose reach extended throughout the [Spanish speaking] world, which I will continue to illustrate in the excerpts that follow.

In another segment of this same interview Sol indicated that she was interested in learning more about various countries through out the world. She placed these processes within a transnational context as follows:

T: Con quienes...cuando hablas con amigas, son amigas de que partes?	<i>T: With who...when you speak with friends, where are they from?</i>
S: De todo el mundo, yo tengo una amiga en Australia, yo tengo una amiga en Houston, y a veces entro al chat y hablo con cualquiera. A veces de Mexico...	<i>S: They are from all over the world, I have a friend in Australia, I have a friend in Houston, and sometimes I go into the chat room and I speak with who ever.</i>
T: Y como encontraste estas personas?	<i>Sometimes from Mexico...</i>
S: En chat.	<i>T: And how did you find these people?</i>
T: Si? Y es chat en Espanol?	<i>S: In chat rooms.</i>
S: Si.	<i>T: Yeah? And are they chat rooms in Spanish?</i>
T: Y de donde son? Por ejemplo, la persona en Australia, ella es de Australia?	<i>S: Yes.</i>
S: No ella es de El Salvador.	<i>T: And where are they from? For example,</i>

(Sol Interview 7/24/2001)	<p><i>the person in Australia, is she from Australia?</i></p> <p><i>S: No, she is from El Salvador.</i></p>
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Through her e-mail exchanges with friends, she received first-hand accounts about life in different national and geographic spaces Through this next fieldnote excerpt, I signal the transnational social field of these students' lives and how text and literacy facilitated these connections. In the following exemplar, Sol exemplified how she accessed knowledge within the diasporic social networks she established through online friendships. Sol continued to describe how she learned from global online interactions as follows:

<p>T: Interesante. Entonces ella te cuenta de la vida alla? Y hay cosas similares or diferentes?</p> <p>S: Todo es diferente. Por que en Australia el clima por ejemplo es casi lo mismo todo es caliente, por que hablan todo el tiempo ingles. Y las oportunidades de ver otras clases de animales ella las tiene en Australia. Toda la vida es silvestre. Bien monton de campo extenso donde puede llevar a conocer mas. Contra en El Salvador no por que en cuatro horas una</p>	<p><i>T: Interesting. So does she tell you about life there? Are there things that are similar or different?</i></p> <p><i>S: Everything is different. Because in Australia with the climate, for example, it is almost the same. Everything is hot. Talking all the time in English. And the opportunity to see different types of animals she has in Australia. All of life is so wild. A great big, rural area that one can get to know more. In contrast in El Salvador, no [it is not the same], because</i></p>
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<p>conoce casi todo lo cruza todo El Salvador. 7.24.2001</p>	<p><i>in 4 hours one gets to know almost everything, you pass through all of El Salvador.</i></p>
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In the above segment of the interview, my question prompted Sol to compare and contrast her experiences, however, I was thinking about the northeast coast of the U.S. (my own point of reference) when I asked this question. Sol responded by comparing Australia to El Salvador in terms of specific qualities of each national space (climate, language, animals, rural, arid topography). Thus she drew on knowledge from diasporic social networks and situated herself in terms of an Australian – Salvadoran corridor (as opposed to the United States). Through online interactions like the one Sol described above, these youth acquired cultural and social capital in several ways. They broadened their understanding of the experiences of other Salvadorans and Latin Americans around the world. Communication with Salvadorans in other parts of the world also indicated an interest in understanding and establishing ties with Salvadorans around the globe and throughout the Salvadoran/Latin American diaspora. The internet allowed Sol, Luis, and other youth to establish global connections by sending e-cards and e-mail, but it also allowed them to establish new relationships via transnational circuits. These electronic friendships with Salvadorans residing in places like Texas and Australia, provided research participants with vantage points to learn about these specific places as well as what it meant to be Salvadoran in multiple spaces. (Rodriguez, 2005).

In the above example, Sol positioned herself as a global person and as a Salvadoran/Latin American person. That is, youth like Sol were able to expand their

sense of identity and place with a sense of being members of a Salvadoran diaspora. What is more, regular phone calls and email, and “talking” in online chat rooms signaled that not only was their Salvadoran identity important to them, but it was also important to them to remain connected to Salvadoran networks through out the world.

It may be that modern means of communication such as e-mail and e-cards enabled Sol and other youth to maintain similar connections sustained by prior generations of immigrants through mailing letters and cards overseas. However, electronic technology allowed for a much faster pace, and more varied transnational connections, which may have simulated proximity as the students read details about people and events from the familiar places that used to comprise their day-to-day lives. They also learned about unfamiliar settings through the perceptions of Salvadoran acquaintances around the world. Thus there was a temporal advantage provided by advanced technology and more varied transnational connections. Letters and cards sent through snail mail require weeks to send, receive and respond, whereas email, chat rooms and IM, for example, provide almost synchronous/real-time communication (like talking over the phone, yet without the expense). What is more, the speed of electronic communication served to sustain a nearness to their countries of origin that may have made it possible for a more fluid, dual framing of the world to develop.

And yet, the strength of their dual framing as a resource depended upon the extent to which they were able to deploy this dual awareness in resourceful ways in institutions like school. For example, when I first met Sol, she shared her frustration at the U.S. citizen requirement for scholarship applications that would allow her to further her education. In the context of *New Beginnings*, there were multiple opportunities, through

classroom texts and projects, for the students to draw upon their dual framing to engage school work. This might not have been the case in a school environment where no such reference points existed.

In sum, within their transnational social field, youth were able to provide resources, for a social network they left in their home countries. Yet, the knowledge and practices afforded through these electronic networks were only valuable to members of their social networks to the extent they were able to use them. Thus, the power of their transnational experiences depended on the opportunities they had to draw upon these experiences as knowledge resources within institutional and cultural structures.

In addition to communication networks, I also discerned a theme of youth engaging news media outlets to remain connected to family members and the regional places of their childhoods.

Engaging global media.

Various forms of global media served as a resource to the participants of my research. They drew upon popular news media to stay connected with their home-countries and this was an important part of renewing their sense of a Salvadoran identity. They also regularly read D.C.-based newspapers and accessed electronic versions of Salvadoran periodicals online. For example, they watched international news programs, read about El Salvador in local global newspapers such as *The Washington Post* and frequented the *El Diario de Hoy* website (a popular Salvadoran newspaper). They thus drew from their knowledge funds through these literacy practices. Youth generated information resources by engaging various print and visual texts to stay connected to the events back home and in the process acquired data and other forms of information that

helped them to engage similar texts in school. During times of large-scale crises back home, such as the January, 2001 earthquake in El Salvador, I observed they were particularly diligent about engaging these news sources.

Similar to the economic and communication practices I described in prior sections, these youth also positioned themselves in the context of their “readings” of global media. During my interviews and informal conversations with students, they often mentioned watching the cable television channel Univision and reading Salvadoran news sources online. Univision was far more comprehensive in terms of global-Latin American events than mainstream U.S. media outlets (Davila, 1999; Rodriguez, 1999). In this way they stayed connected with activities and events in their home nations and maintained a world view from the vantage point of Latin America. Therefore, engaging global media was yet another way youth participated within the Salvadoran diaspora and were able to draw upon transnational knowledge funds. They engaged media outlets out of a personal concern for family, especially during times of crises in their home countries. They felt what happened there, and they also indexed themselves in terms of the events that happened over *there*.

The following fieldnote excerpts related to this earthquake signaled how students relied on global news media to maintain connections to their home countries and begins to illustrate how these youth made meaning through transnational news circuits and media practices.

<p>There is a heaviness in the air today. Only Milagros says hello to me as Nate and I walk into the class. Everyone else looks down at the table or at each other.</p> <p>I say, “Todo el mundo tan serio.” <i>Everyone’s so serious.</i></p>
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Before the class starts, the students are usually seated around the table chatting about their lives, but today it is quiet. There was a big earthquake in El Salvador two days prior and many of the students talk about their concern for their family members.

During Nate's class the students remain reticent to talk. They do not smile or crack jokes as they usually do. Someone starts talking about the earthquake.

Frankie (the math teacher) pokes his head in and smiles as he says something about not looking so down.

Sol says, "That's because you don't have family there. He pauses and says that he does, he has a lot of family there."

He asks if they know if they (their family members) are okay.

Several of the students say, "No." (Fieldnote, 1/16/2001)

In the above fieldnote the absence of information associated with their loved ones brought about a heaviness and silence that was not typical in this setting. Frankie's attempt to lighten up the mood was met with critique, at least on the part of Sol (That's because you don't have family there. He pauses and says that he does, he has a lot of family there). While Frankie was born in El Salvador, he spent his older childhood years in Los Angeles and then moved to D.C. as an adult. Sol may have presumed that Frankie did not have family there because he grew up in the United States. At times positioning oneself within the diaspora was a means of connecting with others, but in this moment Sol affirmed her connection to the events in her home country by assuming Frankie was not a full member of this diasporic community. Therefore within the ongoing transnational practices that these youth engaged on a day-to-day basis, such as media

practices, they were also positioning themselves in terms of those back and forth dynamics and in terms of their perceived experiences of others. This positioning was an aspect of how they made sense of their day-to-day lives within a transnational frame.

The theme of the earthquake in the context of accessing global media continued a week later as Diana and Sol offered statistics and qualitative descriptions, gleaned from media sources, to describe the extent of damage in El Salvador.

In class Diana says she read about El Salvador in *El Diario de Hoy*.
Milagros talks about *Despierta America*²⁸. She says, “9000 son damnificados-personas que no tiene sitio para vivir.” *9000 people are dispossessed—people without a place to live.*
Sol says a whole town was wiped out in El Salvador. Some people can swim and so they were able to swim away, others drowned. She’s been watching everyday
(Fieldnote, 1/22/2001).

At one level this excerpt illustrates how these youth engaged news outlets, like *Despierta America*—a morning variety show on Univision, *El Diario de Hoy*, a newspaper based in San Salvador, with Latin American viewpoints generally and Salvadoran events specifically. For the purpose of this chapter, I present the above excerpt as an exemplar of an ongoing transnational practice and means of engaging their knowledge funds that I observed and listened to them discuss throughout the year. However, at a more personal level, these youth engaged these channels of information daily because they were worried about family members who resided in El Salvador and the modern means of direct

²⁸ *Despierta America* translates to “Wake Up America” is a Spanish language morning talk/variety show similar to the Today Show or Good Morning America. It is filmed in Miami and broadcast through out the Americas.

communication, phone and e-mail were defunct due to all the damage caused by the earthquake. A few days after the above interaction, Sofi expressed her concern as she responded to a transnational journal prompt as follows:

Sofi asks me if I'll be there on Monday.

I say yes.

She says she'll bring her contacts (her new lenses).

Then she reads the journal assignment out loud,

“Do you believe in spirits, ghosts, and legends? Why or why not? If you've had an experience, write your story.”

She responds, “Why do we have to write about that? Why can't we write about what is happening in our country? I was up all night thinking about that.”

Nate looks at her and nods and then reads the assignment aloud again.

Sofi says, “I don't have any stories.” (Fieldnote, 1.19.2001)

Thus in the midst of the everyday and mundane (e.g. new color contacts), the undercurrents in Sofi's life were the events related to the earthquake in El Salvador (Why can't we write about what is happening in our country? I was up all night thinking about that). While Nate's journal questions prompted the students to draw from their transnational knowledge funds and tap memories of cultural narratives (spirits and legends) the pressing nature of the earthquake took precedence for them at this time. At another point in the year, the theme of spirits and legends was a vibrant topic for discussion and writing (see Chapter 6 for further discussion of spirits and legends as they related to student engagement in academic learning). What is more, Sofi, was not

resisting academic work, in fact she wanted to write. She said, “Why can’t we write about what is happening in our country?” This transnational social field was dynamic, often prompting discussion and opportunities for students to share their personal histories and related ways of knowing, yet this social field was also nuanced and youth like Sofi chose when and how they would engage that field in school and when they would resist with statements like, “I don’t have any stories.”

Thus, by participation in a transnational social field, these youth, worked to remain connected to their loved ones in this case via global media. Furthermore, as they engaged media outlets, they also accumulated knowledge by drawing from data and facts (e.g. 9000 without homes and a whole town wiped out), to develop a portrait of the situation over there. That is, they cultivated and drew on their knowledge funds by maintaining connections to their homelands and accumulating concrete information conveyed through statistics and news media texts. In addition, they collectively shared statistics and information gleaned from these sources and within these processes, they implicitly used data to illustrate the extent of damage due to that earthquake. In this way they positioned themselves in solidarity with family members back home and as members of a diasporic community. What is more, they drew from their transnational knowledge funds as they discussed print, visual and oral texts in academic ways (e.g. citing data). Finally, it is important to note that their participation in a transnational social field did not create particular ways of knowing, however the desire to remain connected to El Salvador/Central America during times of crises seemed to motivate these students in this context to seek out and share information, understand and depict the situation “over there.”

Conclusion

Transnational structural forces positioned the young adult students who participated in this study, and others who share similar life histories, in-between the U.S. and El Salvador in several ways. The economic situation in El Salvador pushed them away from their hometowns and neighborhoods and a U.S. service sector with a need for “low-wage” workers pulled them to D.C. Through concrete experiences such as: cross national journeys and day-to-day practices and activities with members of their Salvadoran social networks in D.C. and abroad, these students participated in a transnational social field.

In many ways their journey(s) across the Mexico:US border and, the preceding national borders, framed their participation in a transnational social field. This journey was a concrete transnational activity, engaged several times by some of the students, because patrol officials at the border turned them back. However, unlike the ongoing communication and economic practices (e.g. sending remittances) that they youth engaged to maintain connections, renew a sense of being Salvadoran, and support members of their social networks in the U.S. and throughout the diaspora, crossing the border was not an ongoing practice in their lives. What is more, this particular experience did not serve the same renewing and/or generative function in their lives as some of their other transnational practices. The economic funds, and in some cases, social support that these youth received in order to cross the Mexico-United States border were practical and a vital reference point when participating in a transnational social field. However, this experience did not offer resources in the same way as the communication, media and economic practices that comprised their material and knowledge funds. And yet it was

an experience facilitated through their social networks and from which they may have acquired memories that influenced how they saw the world. That is, crossing the border was a critical aspect of how they made meaning and framed their experiences within the United States.

Once they resided in the United States, the transnational experiences of youth were multiple and intertwined and included calling upon experiences, information, and family members from El Salvador to create a sense of place and home as they resided in the United States. Through their concrete practices, they maintained a transnational social field “in-between” El Salvador and the United States and in-between their hometown/city and Washington, D.C. Although they resided in the United States and had become adept at navigating the city of Washington, D.C. to secure financial, health, and educational resources for themselves, they also had ongoing concrete and affective interconnections with El Salvador based on intersecting cultural and transnational practices. For the youth who participated in this study each discrete transnational act became part of a larger web of transnational activities; collectively these actions sustained their lives (emotionally, spiritually, and economically) and the lives of their families.

Within the transnational social field of their lives these students engaged social networks as active agents through a series of processes and activities that helped them maintain and create a status in-between the U.S. and El Salvador. What is more, they cultivated resources through their relationships with members of their social networks (e.g. work, family, school, community) in terms of material and knowledge funds. Knowledge funds were accessed by a series of communication practices and material

transactions with members of their social networks in their country of origin as well as through establishing and maintaining social networks with Salvadorans and other Central Americans residing in the D.C. Metro area.

What is more, as these youth made meaning within these transnational contrasts, they positioned themselves as resourceful in a context where they often felt marginalized as low wage part-time workers, youth, Latino/as (or Hispanics), and Spanish-speaking people, among other intersecting markers. By evoking these ongoing comparisons, these youth not only developed dual frames of reference, but also situated their experiences “in-between” both places (Bhabha, 1994). Thus their structural realities as working-class immigrants were mediated by concrete practices and vantage points with value for their lives, including: maintaining relationships, accessing and generating material goods, sustaining a sense of solidarity with Salvadorans throughout the world, and framing their interpretations of events and academic texts.

Finally, through participation in this transnational field these youth were able to take advantage of the material and cultural resources of each place and offset the marginalization they experienced in both national spaces. That is, their awareness of their own marginality in the U.S., and sense of solidarity with El Salvador and Salvadorans mediated this *field*. The experiences, knowledge, and ways of knowing associated with participation in a transnational social field becomes particularly important in the context of this Educational Studies dissertation because it was through these meanings that my participants often made sense of texts in school and other academic tasks. In Chapter 6, I demonstrate how these youth drew on their transnational experiences in the context of academic literacy practices.

CHAPTER 6

ENGAGING STUDENTS IN ACADEMIC LITERACY ACTIVITIES THROUGH A TRANSNATIONAL CLASSROOM SOCIAL FIELD

Introduction

Throughout this dissertation study I have discussed how transnationalism is often framed as the literal movement of currency, individuals, and products back and forth across national boundaries (see for example Basch, Schiller, and Szanton Blanc, 1994). In this chapter, I examine how transnational dynamics manifested for the student participants of this study in terms of their ways of knowing within an academic context. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to present how students called upon their transnational experiences to make sense of their academic texts and assignments. Through the analysis presented in this chapter, I demonstrate how this transnational classroom environment came about, was ongoing, and yet occurred within a continuum of engagement. Finally, in the pages that follow I examine the nuances and patterns within these transnational moments of engagement, illustrating, for example how these moments were often productive and engaging and at other times problematic for the students.

Therefore, as I explicate the patterns within the transnational meaning making and literacy within the classroom setting of my research setting, I address the following major research questions and associated sub-questions:

- 2.) How did these student research participants call upon their transnational experiences in their classroom-based literacy activities?
- 3.) How did the content, pedagogical, and meaning making practices of this transnational classroom intersect to bring about engaging moments for these youth and their teachers and what were the immediate social and academic consequences?
 - a. What were the classroom practices that generated this meaning making?
 - b. How did these students' level of engagement vary depending on the theme of the discussion, the teacher's framing (e.g. types of texts and conversation prompts), context of the text, and their own experiences?

As I discussed in Chapter 2, few studies discuss the meaning of transnational processes for youth (see for example, Sanchez' (2007) work on transnational funds of knowledge), nor its relevance within a classroom context. The young adults who participated in this study did not physically move between nations but did so through recall and other analytical practices. In doing so, they often made meaning of texts and classroom assignments within and in terms of the transnational context of their lives. Throughout this chapter, I discuss how the transnational context of these students' lives was salient not only because transnational dynamics were so much a part of their lives, but because the transnational context of their classroom was particularly engaging for them and often enabled them to approach academic work with a greater sense of authority. The following assertions frame the analysis for this chapter:

Assertions:

- 1.) Through the confluence of teacher- and student-generated literacy and discussion practices around particular texts, this classroom context was a transnational social space. That is, the social field²⁹ generated through discussions, reading, writing, and interactions between students, teachers, and their texts was often articulated in terms of transnational dynamics.
- 2.) By engaging narratives based on personal history and sociopolitical themes, research participants made meaning of classroom texts and assignments.
- 3.) Through the transnational dynamics of their classroom, research participants engaged their academic work from positions of authority.

Before presenting a detailed analysis of my data and some of the patterns I identified, I define some of my organizing constructs and terms as follows.

Transnational Engagement

Through their engagement patterns, I observed this classroom as a transnational space for both teachers and students. By *engaging* I refer to stretches of classroom time when all or most of the students participated in a given discussion by responding to their teachers' prompts, and by interjecting their own questions, comments and life stories. In the context of these classrooms, they often engaged in academic activities through transnational acts and ways of framing the world. In the sections that follow, I present analysis reflecting the patterned ways these youth engaged in academic work by drawing from their experiences within the transnational context of their lives and classroom. Perhaps more important, I also examine instances when merging the personal with the academic became problematic and the students resisted academic assignments.

²⁹ See page 13 for a definition of transnational social field. See also, Benitez (2005).

Transnational Classroom Contexts

Like many classroom contexts, academic activities in Nate and Ernesto's classrooms were enacted through a combination of the questions the teachers asked, the texts they selected for their students to read, and the multiple ways their students responded to those texts and prompts, often by drawing from their lived experiences. However in these classrooms, typical teacher:student interactions were often teacher-prompted through references to texts with themes of migration, the experiences of Latinos and Latin Americans in the U.S. and the experiences of *campesinos* in El Salvador. The students in turn responded through their own questions, concerns, stories, critiques, and often by citing past experiences in El Salvador, their current experiences in the U.S., their migration experiences, and the contrasts between all these experiences. Therefore this classroom social context was co-created by teachers and students through prompts, responses, texts and the ways these students made meaning by constantly referring back and forth between El Salvador and the U.S., and between El Salvador and other Central American and Latin American countries. It was this interconnected set of collaborative dynamics and content themes that made their classroom experiences transnational.

A Continuum of Transnational Classroom Engagement

The extent and nature of student engagement within a given classroom moment, was another layer of my analysis. That is, these students engaged in classroom activities through particular content themes within a continuum of engagement. I delineate this continuum in terms of *high engagement*, whether receptive or resistant, and *moderate engagement*. When the class engaged moderately, only some of the students participated

in discussions, and those who did, responded to their teachers' prompts within a typical student-teacher script where the teacher asks a question and students respond in turn. Within these moderate moments, they also responded with fewer details. Whereas when engaging at a high level, each student participated in the discussion, at times talking over each other, in order to convey their points of view. They evidenced high engagement through dynamic exchanges where they interjected their opinions, argued with each other, and issued questions at rapid fire pace. Their engagement was also high when they resisted certain assignments. In these moments each student refused to do a given assignment as they questioned its efficacy or cited their reasons for not wanting to do the assignment. These students rarely exhibited low levels of engagement when the topic at hand invoked the transnational dynamics of their lives. That is, within transnational classroom moments, these students tended to engage at moderate to high levels by asking questions of the text and/or each other, in addition to offering examples from their lived experiences.

Engaging Transnational Experiences through Personal Histories and the Sociopolitical Context of Participants' Lives

A further layer of my analysis refers to the content themes woven through the multiple classroom moments coded as transnational. Therefore, as I explicate how students brought their experiences to the fore within this continuum of transnational engagement, I focus on the content of a given prompt or interaction in terms of personal history and sociopolitical themes, as well as how a given moment was initiated by teachers, students, texts and/or a combination of the former agents.

Distinguishing personal histories from sociopolitical moments.

I marked the moment as personal *history* when the teachers' prompts called for biographical information from the students and the students' responses revealed common experiences and intersecting references in terms of place and time. For example, the youth who participated in this study often responded to personal history prompts by looking back in time to call up stories from their lives. And when they invoked their personal histories they revealed *collective* narratives about the past. Within sociopolitical moments, Nate and Ernesto prompted their students with questions, texts, and/or literacy practices framed by broader political dynamics, including: current events (here and there), historical dates, and/or the role of Salvadoran/Central American institutions within D.C., among other political topics. Their personal histories were also interwoven with the larger historical and sociopolitical events of their countries of origin, events in the United States, and synergies between the two nations. However, within this analysis personal history moments focused on students' biographies, whereas sociopolitical moments focused on larger social issues and/or the greater sociopolitical context of their lives.

In the sections that follow, I further explicate the patterns of transnational engagement within this classroom context through personal history and sociopolitical exemplars. However, in order to illustrate how making sense of academic activities through their transnational context was particularly dynamic and engaging for these students, I begin with two contrasting exemplars of personal history and sociopolitical teacher prompts and ensuing discussions that were not overtly transnational.

As I stated in Chapter 3, the transnational context of these students' lives, both in school and beyond school hours, was so prevalent that these classrooms could more often than not be characterized as transnational contexts. While not every moment or

assignment was transnational in nature and the classroom dynamics were not always transnational, the students were always, yet not only, transnational subjects. What is more, not every transnational moment served as a rich and engaging pedagogical moment and there were projects, assignments and discussions without immediate transnational nuances that were still engaging for students. However, during such assignments these students did not draw from their lived experiences with the same sense of authority as when the discussions were situated within the transnational context of their lives. Nor were these less transnational moments as nuanced or layered as moments that were transnational. Through the exemplars that follow, I illustrate some of the dynamics of less transnational moments.

When the Context was Not Overtly Transnational

Personal Histories

Journaling was a routine practice in Nate's class that often elicited students' personal histories – that is, overlapping elements of their individual biographies. At other times his students responded with their own discrete and disconnected elements of their pasts and present lives. I did not consider disconnected student responses to be personal histories, that is part of what made a given exemplar a *personal history* was that these students expressed their experiences in interconnected ways. Nate typically started a class session by passing out journals - small notebooks with lined paper - reading the journal prompt written on the board behind him aloud, and waiting for them to begin writing. Nate's journal prompts often called the students to reflect on their experiences, share stories from their lives, or offer opinions related to current events with meaning in their day-to-day lives. In the following exemplar, the journal prompt written on the board was,

What does it mean to have a role model?

Who are your role models?

Why are they your role models?

Who do you think are the leaders in your life?

Who are the people you respect?

After the students finished writing, Nate asked them, “who are your role models?” and the students took turns responding as follows:

Diana says, “My mother was my role model...I look like her. She gave me a little bit of love (poquito amor).” [Diana’s mother passed away a year prior]

Yalila responded, “My sister. She does the best she can in school.”

Nate asks the students about Jesus Christ, “Is Jesus Christ a role model in your lives?”

Xiomara shakes her head, sighs and replies, “Ah estas preguntas que nos Nate hace.” *Oh these questions that Nate asks us.*

Nate goes on to talk about how Christ dedicated his life to caring for the poor.

Elias says Che Guevara is his role model. Luis smiles as Elias speaks and exclaims, “¡Viva Cuba!”

Elias modifies his response as follows, “First my mother...Also Che Guevarra because he was a person who helped persons.”

Luis replies, “I love Fidel”

Nate asks why and Luis responds, “Because Cuba could be like the rest of Latin America.”

[Side conversation]

As Nate and Luis have their exchange, Sol leans over to Elias and lowers her voice to ask, “Sabes como mataron al Che?” *Do you know how they murdered Che?*

Elias begins to respond, “En la silla...*In the chair in--*” but gets distracted by Luis’ response to the journal prompt and stops mid-sentence.

Luis says that God is his idol, and like Diana, his mother and father are his role models and then qualifies his statement with, “like my father was.” [Luis’ father was murdered when he was a young boy and still living in Honduras.]

Nate looks at the entire class as he states, “It is important to have role models. How do you know how to be a good person?”

Fieldnote Excerpt 5.15.2001

In terms of content, the initial prompt in this exemplar (What does it mean to have a role model?) was not explicitly transnational. The topic of *role models* could well be engaging in any classroom as it prompts students to talk about people who are meaningful to them. During the moment depicted above, as well as other moments when these youth were prompted for their personal histories, they moderately engaged the topic at hand as evidenced by each student offering a response. The pattern within these moderately engaging moments reflected a fairly didactic teacher-student script where their teacher issued questions and the students took turns responding directly to Nate or Ernesto. In the above exemplar the interaction between teacher and student came about as the students responded to Nate’s questions, however with little interaction between the students, nor did they pose questions to each other or to Nate. Through questioning the

students about their role models, Nate engaged their lived experiences, though not the larger dynamics of their social context. Within such instances – when the topic at hand engaged their experience, yet not the larger social context of their lives, their engagement remained fairly moderate. This distinction between relevant life experiences versus the larger context of one’s life was one that differentiated moderately engaged moments from highly engaged moments. And for these students that larger social context was more often than not interwoven with their transnational experiences, practices, and ways of knowing.

What is more, while the initial prompt of the above interaction was not inherently transnational, there were cross-national reference points, as was often the case in this class. When Elias named Che Guevara as one of his role models and Luis praised Cuba and Che’s role in the political transformation of that nation, the conversation pattern shifted from: student – teacher, to student – student, and student – teacher. Shifting interactional patterns, when a given discussion took on transnational nuances, was another important dimension of this exemplar and many other instances like it within this classroom setting.

Luis’ responses of, “¡Viva Cuba!” “I love Fidel,” and “Because Cuba could be like the rest of Latin America,” signaled his own transnational vantage point. That is, while he resided *here* in Washington, D.C., he identified with what was happening over there, not only in terms of his countries of origin (Honduras and Costa Rica) but all Latin American struggles. Luis expressed this transnational vantage point time and again during class discussions, his interview with me, and ongoing conversations we had during breaks, fieldtrips, and before class started. With Sol’s comment to Elias, she also

indicated familiarity with Guevara as she referred to him with the more affectionate, “El Che,” and was interested enough in his personal biography to hold a side conversation with Elias about the details surrounding his death. What is more, when the discussion did take on transnational nuances by referring to Che Guevarra, some of the students shifted the didactic teacher:student script by interjecting their own comments and questions directed at each other.

Another theme implicit in the above interaction contends with the underlying personal histories within each of the students’ statements. That is, each student’s response was a glimpse into a much deeper, often painful, personal history of transnational migration. For example, when Diana said that her mother was her role model and that she, “loved me a little,” she tapped into a childhood that was severed by her mother’s migration to the U.S. while she and her sister remained in El Salvador as young children. Diana used the past tense, “was” to refer to her mother’s role in her life, and subtly signaled her death. Although I do not know if her comment about her mother’s love (she loved me a little) is a reflection of years of distance, from my conversations with her and her teachers, I do know that she and her mother lived on different sides of the border(s) for many years. This facet of Diana’s personal history overlapped with every other student in the class, each of whom lived apart from their parent(s) for extended stretches of time – months and usually years. In terms of the present discussion about transnational dynamics and engagement, I observed that these students’ cursory references to family or the past were thin facades covering much deeper biographical narratives and intertwining personal histories shared by all the students. During more explicitly transnational moments these students tended to share experiences with much more detailed utterances

and at times by invoking inter-textual narratives. The transnational dimensions of their lives were ever present. They framed not only their personal biographies up to the present moment, but also how they framed their world, and many of the intimate relationships in their lives.

I also present the above exemplar to illustrate how even when the focus of the classroom activity did not overtly invoke transnational dynamics among the students, their connection to Latin America and knowledge of events there was ever present. And when the moment did take on transnational nuances these students engaged distinctly, that is – by bringing their own questions to the fore, by offering information to their peers, questioning their peers for more detailed information, and approaching the topic with what appeared to be confidence and authority.

Sociopolitical Prompts and Contexts

One of the ways Nate and Ernesto engaged their students in sociopolitical themes was by asking their opinions about social problems or dilemmas, as was the case in the following discussion about prostitution. In *Sisters*, the focal book of the following discussion, one of the central characters, is an immigrant from Mexico working as a prostitute in the US while her mother remained in Mexico and received remittances from her daughter. However in this particular discussion, the topics and line of questioning were not overtly transnational nor did the students respond to the underlying transnational themes. The journal prompt on the board read, “What do you think about prostitution? Why do you think people do it? Should it be legal or illegal? Why?”

Dayanara rolls her eyes a little and smiles as she reads the prompt.

Sol asks, “Teacher why do you ask us that?”

Nate replies, "Because I'm curious about what you think [pause] and we are reading a book about prostitution."

The room rumbles with a low murmur as the students begin to write, but I can't distinguish their individual comments.

As Luis reads the prompt from the board he comments, "If they didn't have prostitutes, there would be more rape."

Nate pushes Luis, "You don't think men can control themselves?"

Luis shakes his head as if reconsidering his statement and replies, "No. That's a stereotype. Not all men."

Diana offers her opinion, "These women don't do it because they want to, they can't find another job."

Elias states, "I've never been with a prostitute, but I know people who are [prostitutes]."

José says he also knows women who are.

Luis pipes in, "Monica Lewinsky is a prostitute"

I say, "No..."

Xiomara counters, "The president is a playboy."

Dayanara affirms the comment of her sister with, "President Clinton was a playboy, he was."

Sol adds, "President Bush too. It came out in TV yesterday."

[Students present Elias, Jose, Sofia, Luis, Dayanara, Nate, Sol, Yalila, Diana]

Fieldnote, May 16, 2001

In the above excerpt all the students were at least moderately engaged in the discussion as evidenced by each offering their opinion and drawing upon their lived experiences and personal insights to do so. The students also made connections to the larger political context of Washington, D.C., however, the pattern of interaction focused on Nate as each student took turns responding to his question. Sol questioned Nate's initial prompt, with, "Teacher, why do you ask us that?" and Nate addressed her question by linking his question to their current text and his own interest in their ideas. With Luis' initial comment (If they didn't have prostitutes, there would be more rape), he implied a connection between prostitution and rape. Nate challenged Luis' statement with a question. Luis seemed to pause and reflect and then revised his statement. Diana responded to Nate's second question, "Why do you think people do it?" with her own opinion, by placing the occupation of sex worker within a larger economic context, "These women don't do it because they want to, they can't find another job." José and Elias both cited their lived experiences – connections to sex workers. Luis also offered his opinion and made a connection to the local/national political context. Xiomara in turn immediately countered his statement with a parallel statement, yet about the former president and Dayanara followed with her own opinion as she affirmed the comment of her sister, "President Clinton was a playboy, he was." When Xiomara and Dayanara asserted that the president was a playboy, they add a gendered dimension to the conversation. Finally, with Diana's comment linking women's choices to a limited labor market and limited access to other kinds of well-paying jobs, she moved toward a structural analysis of prostitution in terms of a gendered opportunity structure.

Therefore, during less pronounced transnational moments, prompted by the sociopolitical context of their lives, these students made connections to each other, to larger political issues, engaged in self-reflective ways and moved towards various forms of analysis. And yet their engagement tended to remain at the level of making rather superficial connections; and many of them did not focus on the book or even on Nate's initial question. What is more, the larger context of the above interaction was actually transnational. The protagonist was herself an immigrant who led a transnational life through such practices as sending letters and remittances home to her mother. However, the students did not connect with those transnational dimensions. Perhaps they did not identify with the main character in the novel due to her occupation as a sex worker.

The overall pattern in this setting was that when the context was overtly transnational, the students tended to engage at a higher level. However, as I illustrate through the above two exemplars, even if the context was transnational, but they did not identify with the characters or theme, they only engaged at a moderate level and did not call upon their own *personal histories*. Therefore, explicit transnational themes were not in and of themselves engaging for these students; those themes also needed to be relevant to other aspects of their social context and how they viewed themselves navigating within that context. I present the above two exemplars as instances when the topic at hand had strong transnational nuances and the students engaged at a moderate level, yet did not call upon their experiences in nuanced ways. For the remainder of this chapter, I explore various themes within the overall pattern of engagement within this setting, that is, students engaging at moderate to high levels within a transnational classroom context.

Engaging Student Experience within Transnational Classroom Contexts

By and large, these students were more engaged in academic activities when the context of the discussion was transnational in nature, even if that engagement was articulated as resistance. The students' level of engagement varied from moderate to high during these moments depending on the nature of their teachers' prompt and the context created by the teacher. What is more, they brought their experiences to the fore in more nuanced ways—for example, via familiar narratives and by calling up evidence to support their points. In the analysis that follows, I examine how these youth drew on their experiences to engage explicitly transnational classroom moments. Throughout, I highlight both how this context was enacted through personal history and sociopolitical themes.

Engaging Experience through Personal History

When these students responded to personal history prompts within a more explicitly transnational classroom, they brought forth their experiences from El Salvador, as migrants, and as Salvadorans growing up in the US in ways that intertwined with each other. Within these collective narratives, they also tapped particular thematic strands as they brought forth their experiences and memories. For example, they evoked a collective narrative as they talked about the legends they heard as children, accounts of the civil war, and their memories of migration to the United States. These personal histories were often recounted in terms of the back and forth and past versus present dimensions of their lives. For example, as they shared stories of migration they also discussed how past events in their countries of ancestry impacted them, and resulted in their present day lives and migration.

Nate and Ernesto prompted these personal history moments within this transnational context in patterned ways. For example, they prompted their students to share facets of their personal histories through:

- Direct questions about their (or a family member's) migration (e.g. interview assignments)
- Direct questions about their personal life story and lived experiences
- Direct questions about their opinions
- Direct and in-direct questions about cultural narratives (e.g. legends)
- In-direct questions about political/historical context of their lives

The above range of prompts resulted in discussions and writings about these students' personal histories within or through the transnational context of their lives. Furthermore, different types of prompts resulted in varying levels and character of engagement. For example, direct questions about their personal lives and pasts in their home countries elicited resistance, however questions about their personal histories in the context of a fictional narrative or prompts for their opinions based on their past experiences resulted in receptive engagement.

Ernesto more than Nate tended to directly provide a context for his students to invoke their biographies and histories of migration in the context of the novels he read aloud with them. He called upon *One Day of Life* and *Milagros de la Paz* as the major texts in his class, though he interspersed short stories, non-fiction articles and personal written accounts from published non-fiction authors such as Mario Bencastro throughout the year.

One Day of Life by Manlio Argueta, chronicles a day in Salvadoran history from the distinct vantage points of *campesinos*, soldiers, young people active in the resistance, and children and elders. Through his portrait, Argueta illustrates how Salvadorans played vastly different roles (e.g. soldiers versus activists) during the war, and yet were often members of the same community or family. Implicit in his narratives was a sense of the limited choices rural Salvadorans faced as they confronted their conditions of poverty. *Milagros de la Paz* is set in post-civil war El Salvador and told from the point of view of Milagros a young Salvadoran girl.

As Ernesto facilitated the following discussion, he wrote a timeline on the board comprised of the students' years of birth and significant historical dates in their home countries. He used the strategy of timelines throughout the year, and in the following example he did so by prompting the students for dates associated with their own histories of migration, writing the various dates on the board, and thereby visually representing their lives within the timeframe of the novel. By using this strategy, Ernesto visually represented the historical underpinnings of the novel. The graphic below depicts a segment of the larger timeline on the board. The actual timeline contained the students' birthdates, the years they migrated to the U.S. the dates of Salvadoran wars, and the dates of assassinations of key political and religious figures.

	José		
	1983		
1980	S. Salvador	1984	1986
M. Romero		Diana	Yalila
Sol/Xiomara		Sofia	

As a practice, Ernesto engaged the students in reading and contextualizing these novels and Salvadoran history through significant dates in their own lives (birthdates and dates of migration). He accomplished this, in part, through his own awareness of the larger transnational context of their lives including their own histories of migration and historical events that may have lead to their families' emigration.

In the fieldnote excerpt below, he started the discussion by asking the students about their birthdates in the context of reading *One Day of Life*, a novel about their homeland and significant dates in Salvadoran history.

Ernesto: ¿Vos, cuando veniste aqui? <i>(motioning to Sofi)</i>	<i>Ernesto looks at Sofi and asks, "And you, when did you come here?"</i>
Sofi: 1998	<i>Sofi: 1998</i>
Ernesto: ¿Naciste?	<i>He writes her response on the board, looks to Sol and repeats the question, "When were you born?"</i>
Sol: 1984	<i>Sol responds, "1984."</i>
Student 1: Mataron al papá de su hermana <i>(referring to the book).</i>	<i>He writes this date before Sofi's birthdate. While looking at the book, another student says, "They killed the father of her sister."</i>
Sofi: Por eso mi mami tenia miedo, por que iban a buscar la tambien	<i>Sofi says, "For that reason my mom was scared, because they were looking for her too."</i>
Student 1: A mi tía le mataron.	<i>Her classmate shares, "They killed my aunt"</i>
Ernesto: ¿Cual fue el objetivo del autor?	
Sol: Para relajar la angustia que la gente sentia...para regresar a una vida cotidiana.	
Fieldnote, 11.14.2000	

	<p><i>Looking at the book again, Ernesto prompts, “What was the objective of the author?”</i></p> <p><i>Sol replies, “To relay the anguish that the people felt...to return to day-to-day life.”</i></p> <p><i>Ernesto continues asking the students questions about the book.</i></p>
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In the above exemplar, a student, (who was not a focal student) noted that the father of one of the book’s characters was murdered. Sofi related to his comment by noting the fear that prompted her mother’s emigration (For that reason my mom was scared) and eventually her own migration. Her peer responded that “they,” presumably the military soldiers, actually killed her aunt. Ernesto then brought the discussion back to the book by asking them about the objective of the author. Sol’s response captured both the painful experiences her peers had just described, as well as those of the characters depicted in the book. With the statement, “To relay the anguish that the people felt...to return to day-to-day life,” Sol also responded to Ernesto’s question by tying the literary purpose of the author together with her peers’ connections to/with the novel. The subsequent interaction evolved into a discussion about the experiences of the novel’s characters woven together with the student’s own experiences.

I present the above exemplar to illustrate how Ernesto directly opened contexts for these students to invoke their biographies and histories of migration. The interaction depicted above was transnational as they shared their stories of migration and discussed how past events in their countries of origin impacted them and then resulted in their

present day lives. Furthermore, the students engaged at a moderate level as evidenced by only some of the students sharing their thoughts, their tone of voice, and the overall modest cadence of the discussion. Ernesto drew upon a text that was responsive to the students lives at several levels: it was set in their country of birth, depicted characters that reminded them of their family members, and was written in a discourse that simulated the ways Salvadorans actually spoke. The students identified the familiarity of this discourse as one of the reasons they enjoyed *One Day of Life* during interviews and discussions led by Ernesto. In interviews and informal conversations, a couple of them noted that the book was written, “like we speak.” Through the combination of these discursive, content, and geographic elements, this book helped Ernesto create a context for his students in which they brought together their personal histories with the history of their country.

At first glance, the prompt, “When were you born,” might seem like a personal history prompt similar to Nate’s, “Who was your role model?” prompt (see exemplar presented earlier in this chapter). However, through a combination of the dates written on the board and the text of the novel, Ernesto opened discussion spaces for his students to deepen their understanding of the text through the transnational social context of their lives within a larger political and historical context. For their part, the students co-constructed this space by responding to Ernesto’s questions with further details from their own experiences and overlapping with the storyline in the book.

Through particular literacy practices – reading this text aloud with the students and co-constructing the timeline with the students – discrete facts from the biographies of each student came together to form the personal histories of the class. Ernesto also

prompted his students to analyze the text by asking them about the, “objective of the author,” a form of literary analysis, which in this instance prompted Sol to convey her perspective. In a way, the students were also responding to the text by connecting the anguish they and their families felt. Thus, through his questions (When did you arrive here? When were you born?), particular literacy practices, and texts like, “*One Day of Life*,” Ernesto wove together the lives of the characters in the book, events in Salvadoran history, and the students’ histories of participation. At this intersection between pedagogy, text, memory, and the setting of the discussion, the students and Ernesto co-created the above transnational interaction.

These teachers and students also invoked personal histories and enacted a transnational classroom context through their discussions of the cultural narratives embedded within the novels they read in class. Nate and Ernesto each prompted students to discuss their pasts by asking them to comment on aspects of their lives in El Salvador, though Nate tended to prompt these discussions through journal assignments, whereas Ernesto prompted these discussions as the students read. In the previous example, Ernesto prompted the discussion via questions about the students’ biographies in the context of a novel. In the following example, their transnational context came about through a confluence of the same text, the students’ cultural narratives and memories, and prompts from both of their teachers.

Legends and supernatural stories.

As stories passed down for at least two generations, legends and their manifestation in dreams or as spirits were cultural narratives within all of these students’ lives. These super-natural stories, at times also legends, were part of the culture of the

countryside where many of the youth were from. The telling of these narratives in their U.S. classroom context became transnational acts as the students recalled them to explain the storylines and morals of legends to Nate and myself. Typically these stories are told to young children by elders (parents or elder siblings or other family members) usually to scare them and also to entertain. However, in the classroom context of this study the telling came about as these students explained this type of cultural narrative to their teachers by drawing upon their pasts and transnational funds of knowledge.

In this next exemplar, the students were finishing up the novel, *Un Día en la Vida* by Manlio Argueta (*One Day of Life*) with Ernesto. During the last few pages of the book, Chepe (a central character) tells the legend of *La Siguanaba*³⁰ to his wife, his children, and his grandchildren. At this point in the story the students laughed loudly as they continued to take their turns reading pages from the book. All the students were laughing (Diana and Milagros had tears in their eyes because they were laughing so hard), and making comments as they read Chepe's rendition of *La Siguanaba* out loud with Ernesto. Nate who was present in the room during this part of Ernesto's class, overheard this exchange and later asked the students about the legends they heard

³⁰ "*La Siguanaba* is a Salvadoran legend or myth that tells about an apparition in the form of a woman with her face covered by thick, gray-black hair, white arms with fine, ivory-like, long and thin fingered hand and shiny, pointed nails. The legend says that *La Siguanaba* or *Siguamonta* (Indian Pipil word that means beautiful woman) only appears at night in trails to single men or men that live out of marriage with a woman, to boys and old men, when they are not wearing blessed medals, crosses or religious insignias" (www.elsalvador.org). Traditional legends are also part of how the nation state of El Salvador defines itself as well as a facet of students' memories of childhood that they invoked in their English and Spanish classes. Thus the legend of *La Siguanaba* is an example of a cultural narrative from this country both from the government's official vantage point and the students' day-to-day lived. Legends are also examples of oral texts of rural, campesinos. It is interesting that the government has appropriated these narratives of communities that are economically and politically marginalized as iconic texts of the nation. Perhaps this is part of the "hermano lejano" *distant brother* agenda (see for example Rodriguez, 2005). That is, it is the rural people who are migrating by and large and whose remittances the government has come to depend on as an export commodity (the actual labor of migrants). Therefore it may be that this acknowledgement of *La Siguanaba* is part of how the government positions itself as a "peasant" nation that is open to all, even if the wealth is still held by a relatively small percentage of people.

growing up. They responded to his question with overlapping utterances of the legends they heard growing up. The following fieldnote excerpt depicts the exchange.

Diana starts the round of storytelling by explaining that she and her siblings used to tell a story about a woman who stood on a fence with her hair on end. When they used to tell this story at home, none of the kids in the room wanted to turn off the light but the light went off anyway.

Alejandro shares a story about a horse that was found the next morning, with its hair in “trenzas” *braids*. He says, “Se castigaron...” *They were punished*.

Nate translates, “They were punished.”

Alejandro continues, “Their hair was curly.”

Diana chimes in, “They had brushed it the night before...”

Yvette shares a story about this lake in the Dominican Republic where it was said that there was a mermaid.

According to her recount, when young men went swimming, the mermaids took the men away. (Fieldnote, 1/16/2001)

In the above fieldnote excerpt Diana, Alejandro and Yvette called upon their experiences by re-counting elements of their respective stories to respond to their teacher’s question as they read an academic text set in their homelands. Their level of engagement in this example was somewhat high, yet not particularly animated and the rhythm of the discourse was steady and routine and told in a matter-of-fact tone. They did, however engage in this discussion and text through various intertextual juxtapositions. That is, they brought together stories from their experiences with

Salvadoran cultural narratives (legends) and a narrative they had just read in class. For example, when Diana shared her story about a woman with wild hair who was feared by children (and men), she connected her tale with the cultural narrative of *La Siguanaba* – the iconic character of a strong female who men find threatening. Next, when Diana interjected the line, “They had brushed it the night before,” she helped Alejandro co-construct his story about the punished horse. In addition to these inter-textual moves, Alejandro’s utterance was also inter-subjective as he built on Diana’s story through the theme of punishment. *La Siguanaba* is a wild woman who punishes men, likewise the woman in Diana’s story is also a feared wild woman, and the horse in Alejandro’s story gets punished by having its wild hair braided. Yvette also followed a punitive theme along gender lines as she spoke about a mermaid, perhaps another iconic character in Dominican legends, who punished men by taking them away.

Luis added to the above round of stories by sharing the following account from his childhood about spirits. He also wove in elements of his personal biography.

Luis starts his story by sharing that when he was in fifth grade he started going out smoking. He continues by explaining that around that time his Mom sent him away to live on a farm. As he describes the farm to us he notes that there were a lot of horses there. One horse was named Lucero and there was a big dog there also.

Luis says, “They were punished.” He continues to describe how the next morning the horses were all scratched up yet no one was around their house.

I ask, “So it was a mystery?”

Luis responds, “Yeah.”

“They think it was spirits?” I probe further.

Luis says, “They don’t know. My cousin burned the house.”

Again I clarify, “Because they thought it was haunted?”

He replies, “Yeah, he built another house in the same place.”

His peers were silent as he recounted his story and looked at him intently.

(Fieldnote, 1.16.2001)

As Luis concluded his story, Yvette added, “En los Dominicanos, there are too much...too many witches. They go on the roof and if the babies are not baptized then they suck their blood a little, *chupar* a little bit everyday.” Yvette’s story also evoked an image of a house as she spoke about witches who used to hang out on rooftops to suck the blood of babies who are not baptized. Like Diana’s account about how “they” (her siblings in El Salvador) used to tell stories and then the light would mysteriously go off, Luis also situated his suspenseful story within the “real” uncertain context of a house from his childhood. Also, like Alejandro, Luis shared a story about horses punished under mysterious conditions. Unlike his peers who recalled established legends, Luis described “real” life, and he used the same mystical style as his peers. Through his account, we learned that he used to live in the city, he got into trouble, and his mother sent him to live with family members in a rural community as a disciplinary measure. Luis was a young adolescent (approximately 12) when this event occurred. When he noted that his mother sent him to live in the country as a penalty for his behavior, he wove together his own experience of punishment with a narrative about a horse that was punished. Thus, in his account, he brought together elements of the text of his life with the story of his cousin’s house using the narrative style of a legend with phrases like, “they were punished” and,

“they don’t know...” which added a nuance of mystery and uncertainty. What is more, his account was situated within the rural spaces of Honduras, thus evoking a theme of place that was also shared by his peers.

In terms of how these interactions came about, Ernesto and Nate initially prompted the interactions above. Ernesto presented them with a book written in a discourse familiar to them and within which these familiar cultural narratives were embedded. Through the text, Ernesto offered a context they could relate to and evoke their funds of knowledge. Nate in turn prompted a space for the re-telling by listening to the animated exchange between the students during his colleague’s class and asking them to explain the stories. I also contributed to this interaction by asking them why the female character was depicted in particular ways.

Many of these legends had an underlying punitive theme, however what is important for this analysis is that the students responded to each other with that thematic pattern. Whether conscious or not, the students’ point of reference - the theme of punishment, was also a key trope within each of their stories. They also shared segments of their stories through overlapping intertextual links. That is, the students’ accounts of legends and stories about spirits in their own lives (oral texts), paralleled and intersected with the plots of their peers’ stories as well as the legend conveyed by the character in this novel. There was the text of the legend, the moral of the story, the memory associated with the story, and all the variations told by each student. The themes of punishment and the supernatural were also elements of what made these recounts personal histories rather than individual isolated stories. Each of the overlapping stories was told from the vantage point of when they lived in their home country. What is more,

these students called up legends to teach their teacher and in doing so the telling was not only a transnational act, but placed them in positions of authority.

Embedded within the stories were certain *morés* reflecting gendered cultural norms. As Sol recounted a common story from her childhood, to Nate and myself in her U.S. based classroom, she called up a memory within her homeland which was also referenced within the text of the novel (Fieldnote recorded 1/16/2001). When I asked why the character was being punished, Sol could not remember at first, but then discussed how *La Siguanaba* had two lovers and got pregnant by one. As she relayed details from the passage, she also added her own points and story elements. For example, Argueta/Chepe's rendition of *La Siguanaba*, depicted a scary woman with her hair on end who seduced men. However, details such as her feet were turned around, and that she was being punished for specific reasons by an unknown force, presumably God or *the spirits that be*, were all details that Sol added to her summary of the legend. Thus at the intersection of her own account and the parallel accounts of her peers, the inter-textual re-telling of these legends was an expression of her personal history as well as a chance to weave her own story into a school story.

These personal histories were told through several overlapping and embedded narratives or texts. The recounting of the legends became a transnational point of contact between the students as well as between the students and their teachers. In this classroom context, prompting the legends tapped a wellspring of other stories, opinions, details about their lives, and cultural narratives. These narratives were also facets of their personal histories as each student held them in common and knew the story lines. What is

more, these legends were a referent for each student and part of a larger web of stories woven into the cultural fabric of their homelands.

Thus, within the transnational field of their classroom, these students became teachers and learners in different ways. In both the less and more explicitly transnational examples these students made connections between each other's statements. However, within the more pronounced transnational classroom moments, they built upon each other's comments by bringing forth personal history narratives. Transnational acts such as calling up the stories from their homelands were important contributions that helped to create this transnational context. Thus it was the act of going back in time and space to bring forth, in this case, memories through narratives that was particularly engaging in this United States context. What is more, through these written and oral practices they brought themselves to their classroom tasks with a sense of authority. The students engaged these discussions from a stance of authority in several ways. Each student knew a story and had one to tell. They each told the story from the vantage point of author/expert and knew the moral of the story. Their sense of authority was facilitated by the transnational context of their classroom as they relied on their lived experiences growing up in El Salvador/Central America, an experience neither of their teachers shared with them – in order to teach their teachers about the narratives of their childhoods. What is more, the combination of recall and overlapping student narratives created an engaging transnational context for the students. In other words, this transnational back and forth recounting was *how* they engaged the text and classroom space – how they brought their experiences forth.

Eliciting personal histories and meeting with resistance.

Through each of the above personal history exemplars, I illustrate patterns within the transnational engagement of these two instructional settings – Nate’s and Ernesto’s classes. I have shown how these moments came about through a combination of teacher-generated discussions and writing prompts, reading particular texts, and student-generated responses to texts and the ways students brought their experiences to the fore. However, as I noted at the onset of this chapter, each transnational moment was not engaging and certainly each and every personal history prompt did not lead to vibrant student-teacher interactions. As I analyzed my data, there was also a pattern of resistance within certain transnational moments. In this next exemplar Nate had just explained they would be conducting interviews with a family member or acquaintance. He wrote the outline for the assignment on the board as follows.

On dry erase easel:

Outline for questions

i. Basic information

- When did you come?
- Who did you come with?
- How long did the journey take?

ii. Life in home country

- Why did you come to the U.S.?
- What do you remember about your country?
- How did you prepare for the journey?

iii. The Journey

- What countries did you pass through?

- Did you cross the border?

- What were your experiences with immigration officials like?

iv. Life in the U.S.

- How did you feel about this country?

- Do you want to return to El Salvador?

As the students settled into their chairs and began to read over the assignment, they responded as follows:

As Lila looks over the list, she says, "I'm not going to do it."

Her peers remained looking at the head of the room, with notebooks closed. Some shook their heads as they read the assignment.

Nate explains that they are going to interview someone in their lives and then write an essay. He asks me to help with this part. I stand at the front and ask the students to think about questions they could ask.

Sol: This is boring. We should be getting ready for the GED.

Tehani: This is part of getting ready for the GED

Sol: But I already know how to do this.

Tehani: This kind of assignment is important because it is teaching you how to use the language. This way you'll be able to manipulate the language in English...

Sol slowly pulls out her notebook and starts writing questions.

I sit down. The students begin writing.

Diana whispers to me that yesterday was her daughter's birthday. She pulls out a picture to show me.

In the above exemplar, the students resisted the assignment in several ways. Lila voiced resistance by refusing to do the assignment all together, whereas others disengaged by focusing on other themes in their lives, as was the case with Diana who spoke with me about her daughter's birthday party. In Sol, Luis, and Jose's cases they resisted by arguing that the material was not relevant to their larger goals at that time – to prepare for and pass the GED. Nate and I defended the assignment by emphasizing the utility of it. For my part, I was thinking of other interview assignments I had given to young people while working as an educator in Los Angeles and Lansing, Michigan and how powerful and engaging these assignments had been for them. What I, and perhaps Nate, failed to see in that moment was that in past interview assignments, I also started the assignment or project with a general theme and then asked the youth to generate their own questions. In the above case the actual questions may have been confining and/or threatening to them because they were so personal and they were imposed upon the students.

This assignment was distinct from the other assignments prompting their personal histories in which students voluntarily brought their experiences to the fore. Part of what made this assignment different was that the students were directed to reveal aspects of their personal lives and those of their family members. What is more, the specific personal story they were asked to reveal was one layered with painful memories, nebulous documentation status and little to no latitude regarding how to approach the topic. During other assignments, when Nate asked them to share opinions related to aspects of their personal lives, the students choose what to emphasize and/or underplay. There is also a difference between opinion and actually sharing the details of one's life, especially such a pivotal experience as one's journey to the United States. By contrast,

when the questions were embedded within an academic activity and/or text, they readily engaged the discussion and did so by bringing forth their experiences. It may well be that these students did not mind doing the interviews, but did mind doing the interviews for their teacher, versus for themselves. They may also have resented doing an assignment that seemed unrelated to their academic path. Luis, Sol and José had particular expectations for themselves related to the content of viable academic activities.

Thus, when these students were directly prompted for details about their personal lives, they resisted the given assignment. In order to actively engage in the texts at hand, they had to understand how a given assignment related their academic goals-be it to learn English, pass the GED, or acquire sufficient skills and content knowledge to transfer to a traditional public high school.

However, this example is also nuanced. Although they rejected the assignment initially and did so through the means I describe above, most of the students eventually did the assignment. They conducted the interviews and from their written essays and journal reflections, it appeared that they actually found the assignment to be rewarding. In these written artifacts they talked about learning aspects of their parents and siblings lives that they never knew before.

Personal history assignments such as the ones presented above are not inherently intrusive, nor do I believe that students will always resist them. Likewise, it is possible that these students did not resist entirely due to the personal nature of the assignment as much as it was the deep nature of the assignment. It could also have been that in this instance they were more focused on passing the GED. These students had very real time constraints given that a substantial portion of their days were absorbed by work and

family commitments, and they voiced how important it was to them to have meaningful and relevant assignments (e.g. work that would lead to a credential such as the G.E.D.) through their resistance. However, given that they ultimately found value in the assignment, their resistance could also be read as an expression of fear at being pushed beyond their comfort zones.

Therefore, the way one invites a young person to bring their experiences to the fore, especially within the transnational context of their lives, is key. If youth are able to engage their own sense of agency in the process of calling upon their lived experiences, I observed that they were likely to do so in richer, more layered, and complex ways. This may mean that educators need to consider *how* they work with students to make connections based on their lived experiences in the context of project-based and personal assignments.

Engaging Youth through the Sociopolitical Context of their Lives

Within both Ernesto and Nate's classrooms, I observed that discussions and assignments prompted within sociopolitical themes were particularly engaging for these students. By sociopolitical, I refer to discussions and writings framed by electoral politics, governmental institutions, and the greater power dynamics at work in students' lives. In this next section, I examine how students brought their experiences to the fore when the classroom moment was explicitly transnational and was prompted or framed by sociopolitical issues. Within these themes students brought their experiences to the fore as they actively engaged the topic at hand. They also drew upon their lived experiences distinctly when prompted through the sociopolitical context of their lives by taking stances (Lee, 2001), positioning themselves within the transnational context of their lives

as part of a larger argument, calling upon evidence, and insisting upon evidence from their teachers and peers. Just as personal history moments were co-created by teachers and students, so too were sociopolitical moments co-created through a combination of teacher prompts, texts and student experiences in the United States, El Salvador/Central America and within the spaces in between both locales. However, within these sociopolitical moments Nate and Ernesto tended to prompt and students tended to respond within social science conventions, that is, by citing data and presenting arguments in terms of evidence. They also called up experiences and knowledge acquired through the transnational context of their lives.

In terms of engagement, often times these sociopolitical moments were engaging, though the extent of that engagement depended on the extent to which they could draw from their prior knowledge. In other words, when the context was both transnational and sociopolitical the students actively engaged in the topic at hand and seemed interested however the extent of that engagement depended on the depth of their own content knowledge.

These sociopolitical classroom moments came about through a combination of texts, teacher prompts and students' experiences, framed around such topics as local civic and diplomatic institutions connected to their students' lives, events in El Salvador – particularly those with an impact on their families' (e.g. the economy, labor market, and natural disasters), as well as discussions about the U.S. elections – particularly as the issues that framed those elections related to U.S. Latino/a communities. Often times within the same stretch of conversation, these students and their teachers wove in and out of personal history and sociopolitical themes. This was especially true for this group of

young people who were acutely aware of how government policy, politics, and actions impacted their collective life pathways. Through out the sociopolitical exemplars I present below, the classroom moments were dominated by larger policy themes and topics related to formal governance, rather than by day-to-day personal experiences and histories.

For example, in the following fieldnote excerpt Nate prompted a sociopolitical discussion and the students readily engaged as evidenced by their participation, however the discussion was limited by their content and vocabulary knowledge. Nate initially prompted the discussion through a discussion about *The English Lesson*, a short story by Judith Ortiz Cofer. In many ways, the setting of *The English Lesson* paralleled the setting of Nate’s classroom – an English class for immigrant students learning English as a second language. In the excerpt below, Nate was in the midst of a series of reading comprehension questions when he asked the students, “Does Diego Torres like the U.S.?” [The character of Diego Torres is a Dominican immigrant.]

Xiomara responds, “No. He wants to make money.”

Diana adds, “He wants to make money and buy a house in his country.”

Nate continues prompting the discussion, “What kinds of jobs are there in the DR?”

Yalila looks at the text as she responds, “Doesn’t say.”

Nate stays with this line of questioning, “How do you get jobs in the DR? What kinds of industries?”

Xiomara offers, “Politicás” *Politics*

Nate asks, “What kind of industries? Who controls the jobs?”

Several students reply, “U.S.”

Nate continues to probe, “No, what industry?”

Xiomara replies, “No entiendo.” *I don't understand*

Nate states translates, “Industria.” *Industry*

Xiomara repeats the term, “Industria,” as she looks at the book, “No dice señor.” *It doesn't say, sir*

Sol looks up and states, “Sugar and tourism.”

Nate nods, “Very good.”

(Fieldnote, 2/21/2001)

In the above excerpt, Nate's questions, and the students' responses, offer a lens into how these students positioned themselves in their countries of origin and here in the United States in that the students responded to Nate's questions in ways that paralleled their own lived experiences. When Xiomara and Diana responded to Nate's prompt, “Does Diego Torres like the U.S.,” with, “No. He wants to make money,” and, “He wants to make money and buy a house in his country,” they reflected both the sentiments of the character in the book and their own opinions based on their own transnational experiences. This excerpt reflected their transnational engagement as they discussed the character's reasons for being in the United States and for wanting to learn English with utterances reflecting their own transnational experiences (Learn English to get a better job to help family). However within that engagement, they were fairly confined to the teacher's script. They did not depart from the question and answer format prompted by Nate.

With the specific question, “What kinds of jobs are there in the DR?” Nate shifted the discussion away from reading comprehension questions, and called the students’ attention to the sociopolitical/economic context of migration. With this shift, he also assumed that they had some understanding of this context and the meaning of the term “industry/*industria*,” at least in the Dominican Republic. As Sol responded, “sugar and tourism,” she reflected some understanding of this sociopolitical/economic context of migration and that business is conducted in terms of politics versus merit.

In sum, Nate’s questions in the above example initially prompted his students to consider why the characters in this story were taking an English class, but also why they immigrated to the United States in the first place. For their part, the students responded by bringing their own experiences of living in a transnational context (United States, El Salvador, Dominican Republic) to bear on his questions. In this particular example, they did not engage with as many examples, questions, or narratives, perhaps because his questions did not tap their direct experiences.

However, in comparison to less explicitly transnational moments, like the prostitution exemplar I presented earlier in this chapter, these students responded to Nate’s questions by examining the text and trying to find answers, and even when they were unsure of the appropriate response, continued offering responses. In the prostitution example, they understood the text of the novel, responded to his questions and made connections to current events, but did so in a disjointed way. In the above example the story was transnational and line of questioning was directly related to the characters’ and their own transnational experiences and may have prompted them to focus and engage even if they were not entirely certain about their responses.

In sum, the combination of a text and line of questioning that was not only transnational, but also responsive to their lives, encouraged these students to at least engage in discussions like the one depicted above at moderate levels. Within that moderate engagement, they worked to respond to Nate’s questions and drew from the knowledge they had, but did not call upon embedded narratives as with the prior personal history examples, nor did they press for evidence or contest each other as will become evident in the exemplars that follow.

Through my analysis, I discerned that when the classroom context was created through a combination of texts and prompts that allowed them to draw on the transnational context of their lives and the theme was sociopolitical, the result was a very high level of engagement. In the exemplar below, Nate prompted the moment by assigning the students to read and write about an article describing South American migration. The ensuing discussion and debate came about as students commented on the article, offered opinions, and contested each other’s statements – all based on their experiences here, there, and the many ways they made sense of their lives in-between the two spaces. Through this journal prompt, Nate summarized the article in terms of economic and political factors and then asked the students to consider issues of immigration from the vantage point of the U.S. government with the question, “should the U.S. government allow all immigrants to come here?”

Journal: According to the article we read yesterday, South Americans are immigrating to the U.S. and other countries for economic and political reasons. Should the U.S. government allow all immigrants to come here? Why or why not?

The day before I recorded the following fieldnote excerpt, Nate gave the students a Washington Post article to read about South American migration patterns, including increased levels of South American emigration. As I illustrated in Chapter 5, these youth were accustomed to thinking about immigration issues from their vantage points as migrants to D.C. and as Salvadoran children residing in El Salvador. However Nate engaged them in a compare and contrast exercise across national borders from an unfamiliar subject position-the perspective of the U.S. government. Luis responded to the journal writing prompt as follows:

I think the United States can allow immigrants to come from South America and I think they're more intelligent than people from Central America. But, the U.S. cannot allow all of them to come here because that could be fatal because there are a lot of criminals and some of them are presidents, senators, and people from the government. But at the end of the road, the U.S. government is going to say, No more Hispanic people
(Written artifact, 12/12/2000).

In his response, Luis addressed the prompt directly by asserting that the U.S. can allow immigrants to come here from South America, but then expanded the scope of Nate's prompt by adding that, "they (South Americans) are more intelligent than Central Americans." At first glance this would seem to imply that he saw South Americans through a superior lens and his own Central American roots from a deficit perspective. However, his reasoning was actually much more complex. In his response to this piece of writing, he indicated how different Latino/a and Latin American populations are positioned distinctly by the US government. The next phrases, "But the U.S. cannot allow all of them to come here because that could be fatal," also appeared to reflect a dominant

US, deficit discourse depicting Latin American immigrants as criminals—usually associated with drug trafficking. However, the rest of the clause revealed that he referred to white collar, political criminals, and actually seemed to critique South American migration to the U.S. (Some of them are presidents, senators, and people from the government). His final sentence, “But at the end of the road the U.S. is going to say no more Hispanic people,” reflected his perspective of a U.S. government that homogenized all Latinos (presumably U.S Latinos and immigrants) as one racialized “other” – read Hispanic – who were not welcome here in the United States. In his writing, Luis drew upon his transnational experiences interacting with South Americans, experiences in El Salvador, experiences in the US with “Hispanics”, and his own experience going back and forth in his minds eye to respond to the prompt. Luis also engaged Nate’s prompt by drawing upon his perspective as an immigrant to the U.S., who understood how people with Latin American roots were positioned by the US government under the monolithic rubric “Hispanic.” His response also signaled his experience as a Central American who had formed opinions about South Americans, perhaps acquired within relationships with his Argentinean and Peruvian teachers, his friend (Alejandro) who is Colombian, and others who comprised his social networks in DC. Therefore he drew upon his transnational experiences – interacting with South Americans, experiences living within a United States *Hispanic* context and his experience going back and forth in his minds’ eye to respond to the prompt.

In her writing, Sofi also drew upon her transnational experiences to respond to the prompt, but focused on her social position as a worker:

I think only the White people should have to stay in the United States, so they can

know how hard it is in this country to have to work outside in construction or be working in part time work.

Ninety percent of Hispanics work in part time or outside in the cold or hot weather.

*What jobs do White people have?*³¹

Easy jobs like typing computer and other easy jobs.

(Written artifact, 12/12/2000)

In contrast to Luis, Sofi engaged the prompt indirectly, yet also by drawing from her own transnational experiences as a migrant, a worker, and like Luis, one who resides within the transnational context of her day-to-day life in D.C. Instead of writing from the perspective of the U.S. government, Sofi inverted Nate's prompt and responded by arguing for closing the borders not be to exclude, "Hispanics," but rather to keep White people in. She articulated this response by imagining a U.S. without immigrant labor (*so they can know how hard it is in this country to have to work outside in construction or be working in part time work*). As she presented her argument she seemingly drew from her own experiences as an immigrant Salvadoran who worked part-time in the service sector (cleaning office buildings at night) and whose friends worked in construction. She further framed her argument by alluding to the way the U.S. economy depends on immigrant labor for lower wage work such as construction and "part-time." According to Sofia, without immigrants "White people" would have to do the "hard" work that sustained and literally constructed the city. Sofi drew upon her experiences within this transnational social field, where she situated herself within a receiving city where immigrants do all the

³¹ Italics indicate a note Nate wrote her in her journal entry.

hard labor in the city. What is more, according to her, the white elites depend on this labor, so much so that if the immigrants left, they would have to do this labor themselves. Through these analytical comments, she tapped a central tension within the transnational labor market. That is, the economies of more powerful nations, such as the United States, depend on the labor of the working class people of less powerful and wealthy countries, like El Salvador (here and abroad) to sustain a growing service sector and a diminishing manufacturing sector.

In the exemplar that follows, the students engaged this same newspaper article about South American emigration through a class discussion. Once the students finished writing, Nate asked them to share their ideas and their writing about this article, starting with the question-why do people emigrate from South America? Milagros opened the discussion with, “They need to make more money.” Presumably, “they” referred to the South American emigrants. José offered, “Políticas...políticas.” *Politics...politics*. Nate repeated Milagros and José as he wrote their comments on the board along with the responses of other students. He continued to prompt the discussion with, “What I want is your opinion. Do you think anyone should be able to come into this country or should there be restrictions?”

Sofi asks, “What are restrictions?”

Sol translates, “Restingindos.”

Milagros says she feels the borders should be opened up and people should be able to emigrate north.

Luis expresses that most of the people who emigrate from South America are smarter than the people who come from Central America, “They are better educated.” He looks at

me.

I respond, “Say more.”

Milagros started the above discussion by framing the issue – South American immigration – as she argued for opening the border (between the U.S. and Mexico) and allowing “people” to migrate north, thereby expanding the discussion from South Americans to potentially all Latin Americans. Luis responded that most of the people who migrate from South America are smarter and with this comment the discussion took a turn and went from a typical classroom exercise/discussion to an intense discussion revealing the students’ allegiances and experiences in terms of their countries of origin, their socioeconomic status, and their vantage points as workers within a transnational social field. What is more, they engaged the discussion through arguments where they called upon and defended their transnational experiences as Salvadoran/Central American migrants. Luis, as a Honduran/Costa Rican-Central American voiced a controversial position among his peers – that South Americans are smarter and better educated than Central Americans. His Salvadoran-Central American peers responded to him with disagreement, as the following fieldnote illustrates:

Several students interject to disagree, but the discussion is happening so fast I do not catch each remark. Luis again clarifies by stating that most of the people who come from Central America come from the country, they don’t have an education and so they come here and get the bad jobs. He further argues that they are not as smart as the South Americans who have gone to college before they come here.

As the discussion continues, several of the students have raised their voices, are

talking over each other, and disagreeing with Luis.

Milagros takes a deep breath, as her face reddens and tells him to, “Shut up!” At this point the discussion shifts from English to Spanish.

I did not catch all of the students’ comments during this part of the discussion, in part because many of them had raised their voices and were speaking simultaneously. Luis drew from his experience as not only a Central American migrant, but one who had experienced and was conscious of the distinctions between rural versus urban Salvadorans. Luis set up his argument in terms of this rural:urban dichotomy where rural Salvadorans were not educated. As one of the only students who shared his life history in terms of his time living in urban *and* rural spaces in Honduras and Costa Rica, he approached the subject matter of the article informed by experiences in multiple spaces and places, in terms of urban and rural dualisms, and as one who was not Salvadoran. He went on to situate South Americans as “smart” because they have higher levels of education. After these two comments, the discussion shifted again and became an oral battle between Luis and everyone else in the class, most prominently between himself and Milagros. During this contentious exchange, the students’ experiences and allegiances as rural versus urban residents became even more apparent. As the discussion continued, they kept engaging the overall theme of the discussion, South American migration to the U.S., and did so by calling upon their experiences in their own home countries.

Nate keeps interjecting, “English please. Can you say that in English?”

I also interject to clarify Luis’ comments and in an attempt to mediate the rising

argument.

I say, “There’s a difference between being intelligent and having an education. Someone could be very intelligent and never have gone to college.”

Luis nods.

Miguel says, “A lot of people in El Salvador do go to college and they – ”

“But there are no jobs,” José interrupts.

Miguel disagrees, “People get jobs; they get jobs with the government.”

Milagros, seated at the opposite end of the table from Luis, continues to appear angry from her flushed and tense facial expression.

She says, “I am from Central America and I grew up in a rural part and I am not stupid, so shut your mouth.”

She turns to Sofi and says, “That’s because he’s *Catracho* (*nick name for Hondureños*)—that’s why he says that.”

Luis shakes his head in disagreement.

Xiomara says (to Luis), “You shouldn’t say that because that’s what makes them (referring to South Americans) think they are better than us.” She looks at Alejandro (who is Colombian) and says, “Like him.”

At this point there is a pause in the discussion and Alejandro offers his opinion. He says, “Many people who come here [from South America] already have a college degree.” He says he already has a bachelor’s degree—he’s at this school to learn English. I don’t remember if he intends to stay or return to Colombia. (Fieldnote, 12/12/00)

When Miguel stated, “A lot of people in El Salvador do go to college,” he disagreed with Luis using a human capital argument based on his experiences in El

Salvador. José in turn interrupted him with, “But there are no jobs,” and brought the discussion back to the theme of migration in the context of the labor market. With this statement he implied that it was almost irrelevant if one has an education or not, with no jobs, people are forced to migrate for survival.

In other discussions, José positioned himself as someone from the city (San Salvador) versus the country and talked about how rural Salvadorans were discriminated against due to their “Indian” dress and seen to be less educated. During the course of my fieldwork in this community, Miguel only attended *New Beginnings Charter School* for about two months and it was not clear to me where he grew up in El Salvador, but in this discussion he positioned himself vis-à-vis his father’s occupation and social location in El Salvador.

As Milagros told Luis to shut up, she affirmed her own position not only as a Central American, but a rural, Salvadoran, Central American who was “not stupid.” For her, Luis’ statement contrasting the migration patterns of rural Central Americans with less formal education versus more metropolitan South Americans with greater formal education was personal. And she defended herself by positioning Luis as not like them (Salvadorans) in national terms. In her defense, Milagros “othered” Luis because he is Honduran. Xiomara in turn defended Central Americans (us) against South Americans (them). Alejandro, as the sole South American in the room, affirmed his own educational status but not in a disparaging way (*Many people who come here [from South America] already have a college degree*). Although his education and stronger literacy “skills” seemed to have limited currency in the DC/US labor market given that he worked in a restaurant as a line cook/dishwasher—a job that is similar to the jobs of the other

students. It may well be that these students gained an awareness of this rural:urban dichotomy as transnational subjects who resided in the urban context of Washington, D.C. as they read novels reflecting the rural experiences of Salvadorans during the civil war and of rural migrants with Nate through books like *Grab Hands and Run*.

Thus in the above examples (Luis and Sofi's written artifacts and the classroom-based discussion), these students engaged the main idea of the text (South American migration to the US) by invoking their own subject positions in the U.S. as Salvadoran and Honduran migrants and as Latin Americans of varying social status depending on physical space (rural versus urban) and social position (level of education and connections to the government). They also made sense of an article about migration policy by drawing from their own experiences residing in urban and rural spaces and in some cases from an understanding of the economic reasons underlying their own and their compatriots' migration processes. Thus, they addressed the issue from their vantage points as migrants who moved in part due to the dynamics of a global economic structure. They engaged this discussion by drawing from their experiences in both spaces. At one level some of their responses were personal, but the personal was articulated within larger structural arguments centering on the disparities in the global labor market.

During sociopolitical exemplars like the former – these youth engaged at a high level and intense level by calling upon their experiences in El Salvador, the United States and in between these spaces to frame arguments and to make their points. They engaged their transnational experiences through positioning (urban vs. rural) arguments, and by drawing upon their experiences as workers and students in both contexts. What is more, in the above exemplars, these students had the opportunity to integrate reading and

writing through advance preparation that facilitated deep reflection. Thus, the nature of the students' engagement may not have been prompted by personal connection alone, but also by having the opportunity to read, write, and think about the issues prior to and associated with the discussions.

Whereas in the previous example the students engaged through debating each other, positioning, and calling upon their experiences based on social status and social locations as evidence for their arguments, in this next example, the students also engaged through disagreement and debate. In the following exemplar, Nate gave the class several articles to read and then asked pairs of students to develop questions and help him facilitate discussions for the rest of the class. During a discussion about a Washington Post article about the Salvadoran ambassador, led by Luis and Marco, several students responded with a series of critiques. Nate started the conversation below with a question.

Nate: What do you think about the ambassador?

Sol: No good.

Xiomara: Trash can

Tehani: Why?

Xiomara: No help the people.

Marco: He's been helping. He can't help everyone.

Xiomara: Embajada patetica (*Pathetic embassy*)

Sol: Embassy not nice.

Marco: Do you want a mansión?

Xiomara: Not a mansion, just something respectable

Nate: What do you think the embassy should do?

Sol: You don't see people standing outside the French or Italian embassy at 5am...

(Fieldnote, 11/7/2000)

In the first part of this exemplar above (and the second half below) the level of engagement was high as each student not only participated in the discussion, but did so by responding to the discussion questions, issuing their own opinions, challenging each other, and pressing each other for further evidence. Through their responses, several of the students also positioned themselves in terms of the ambassador and the physical structure of the embassy. Sol and Xiomara responded to Nate immediately with, "No good," and the metaphor of, "Trash can," respectively. Through these utterances, Sol and Xiomara, positioned themselves within the physical space of Washington, DC in terms of the ambassador and the embassy, both for the services he/it provided and its physical structure. Xiomara interpreted the building itself as an inadequate representation of Salvadorans with comments like, "pathetic embassy...embassy is not nice...not a mansion, just something respectable..." What is more, when she said, "No help the people [he doesn't help the people] ... You don't see people standing outside the French or Italian embassy at 5am..." she signaled that the ambassador is not an adequate representative of them. They also situated their own transnational experience relative to more resourced European nations and corresponding embassies. Their comments also imply that if the ambassador were doing his job, people would not be waiting in long lines outside the embassy; the ambassador, therefore, was not "helping people."

It is also important to note that the physical structure of the embassy is tucked away on a side street near DuPont Circle. By contrast, some of the embassies representing wealthier nations, located on Embassy Row (16th Street) and other parts of

DuPont Circle, have grand architecture, are gated and decorated with beautiful horticulture. The way this building is situated, its stature, and its lack of ornate signage lend credence to their comments. Part of what makes this particular exchange engaging is the tension between these students' collective identity with the embassy and differing views regarding the integrity of this institution. That is, they all identify with the embassy, yet disagree as to whether this institution has integrity. What is more, it is Sol and Xiomara who bring "the embassy" to the discussion. For them, the physical structure of the embassy mattered as much as the work of the ambassador. For his part, Marco challenged the comments of his female peers by questioning them (*What do you want, a mansion?*).

The conversation continued in the following excerpt, where Sol pressed her peers to defend their position with facts. In this instance, Marco both identified with the ambassador, and he believed that the ambassador was helping people.

Sol asks, how do you say, "hechos"

Nate: Facts

Sol: What are the facts?

José: He [the ambassador] has worked very hard.

Sol: What are the facts? How?

José: He's worked hard on the TPS (Temporary Protective Status)

José: Do you think it is important to have legal papers?

Dahlia: To get a job. Comprende my English? *Understand my English?*

(Fieldnote, 11/7/2000)

As Sol asked her peers to defend their position with “facts,” she shifted the discussion from the physical structure of the embassy to a debate about the work of the ambassador. José, in turn, defended his position at first by noting the ambassador’s work ethic, “He has worked very hard,” and then cited the specific policy of TPS. What is more, he made the topic personal to most of the students in the class when he asked, “Do you think it is important to have legal papers?” Dahlia affirmed José’s argument, with, “[It is important to have legal papers] to get a job.” Within this exchange they moved from the physical structure of the embassy and the role of the ambassador as symbols of themselves to concrete policies such as Temporary Protective Status. This instance was highly engaging as everyone participated, though it was not as emotionally charged as the prior exemplar.

In sum, these youth identified with the civic institutions in the U.S. that represented their homelands. Through out the year, I observed how they kept abreast of the activities associated with these institutions and their representatives via various media practices such as reading local Latino/a newspapers as well as national/global U.S. based periodicals such as the Washington Post. Many of them also sought the services of these institutions. Thus, they brought these experiences and literacy practices as civic participants to their readings of local political figures representing transnational dimensions of their lives. They did not share monolithic views of the embassy, yet all of them indicated a connection to this transnational Salvadoran institution. Just as these youth shared experiences and opinions in ways that demonstrated their ties to civic institutions *here* and *there*, they also brought experiences and perspectives related to their roles as workers within a global context. This exemplar was not simply about being Salvadoran or having an immigrant status, it was about being in the liminal position of

being here and having protected status, but the temporary nature of that status kept them suspended between nation-states in terms of their legal status. A diplomatic institution like an embassy has as its purpose to navigate back and forth within a transnational field on behalf of expatriates and migrants, but due to their social position and status (economic and in terms of immigration status), this function took on sociopolitical dimensions for these students.

Finally, in these sociopolitical moment these students acquired and articulated a sociological imagination (Mills, 1959)—that is, they were able to fuse autobiography with social history, as they called upon their transnational experiences to position themselves in DC as well as understand their pasts in El Salvador. Through these processes they came to see the intersections between events in their personal biographies and personal histories and the larger historical and political forces at work in their lives.

Conclusion

In sum, the patterns of engagement within the classroom setting of this research paralleled the students' back and forth movement in their minds' eyes (see Chapter 5 for further examples of meaning making through back and forth transnational framings). Moreover, their modes of engagement were the features or markers of this transnational classroom context; and it was often over and through texts that these students and their teachers brought about transnational moments of engagement. However, this engagement was not monolithic, rather it occurred on a continuum mediated by their own content knowledge, the extent to which assignments were directly personal, and the extent to which they identified with the subjects of their texts. More often than not, the dynamics of this classroom had transnational nuances, I only presented exemplars of less

transnational moments to illustrate how the students engaged with moderate levels and how transnational dynamics often underlay even the non-transnational exemplars. It is important to note that these processes of engagement were not monolithic, nor tension-free. Therefore, throughout this analysis I contribute a more nuanced understanding of how these youth drew from their ways of knowing in academic contexts. Based on my analysis, I call for a balance between being responsive to students' critiques and challenging them to take on new ways of approaching knowledge. This is especially the case in academic settings where we seek to not only make learning engaging, but to do so in ways that challenge our students to grow and deepen their content knowledge and analytical ways of knowing.

The cross-national dimension to this entire analysis is important because *in-between* the two nations these students were developing an understanding of the disparities between first and third world nations. They experienced that disparity through sending and receiving remittances (or not), their own journeys to the United States, and the differences in language, culture, and space, and how they made sense of texts and other narratives such as their own personal histories, and sociopolitical texts. Related to the content of a given classroom moment, transnational classroom moments afforded these youth opportunities to draw from their experiences and ways of knowing from positions of authority. For example, within their transnational classroom context, they drew from the context of their lives to support their arguments and make claims.

In terms of how this setting came about, both the prompt and content were consistent features of this transnational classroom setting—that is, *how the moment was created* (e.g. the confluence of teacher's questions, texts, and students' opinions) and *the*

actual content of the discussion. In my analysis, I distinguished transnational moments centered on the students' personal histories versus the sociopolitical context of their lives, but in reality the personal history and sociopolitical moments tended to follow one another. For the purposes of this chapter what is important is that they engaged distinctly within the personal history moments (e.g. tapping their own cultural narratives) versus those with a sociopolitical emphasis (e.g. calling upon evidence, crafting arguments, and pressing for and presenting data). Related to the content of a given classroom moment, was the way transnational classroom moments afforded these youth opportunities to draw from their experiences and ways of knowing from positions of authority. For example, within their transnational classroom context, they drew from the context of their lives to support their arguments and make claims.

This chapter is as much about teachers cultivating contexts wherein students may engage and challenge themselves in meaningful ways as it is about educators learning from these moments, connecting to their students' personal histories and offering further opportunities for students to make connections between classroom texts, their own lives, and larger historical and political narratives. Therefore, these classroom moments did not just happen, rather they were co-constructed by the teachers and students and understanding the patterns within this co-construction may help other educators to identify and cultivate similar transnational spaces in their own classrooms. Both Ernesto and Nate enacted a sociopolitical transnational classroom space by positioning their students as public intellectuals through their writing and discussion prompts. However, within the different patterns of co-construction, each teacher had different points of emphasis. Nate listened to the students and was responsive to their interests. Nate's

classes also encouraged them to examine who they were then and there within their present day context in Washington, DC. By contrast, Ernesto created contexts based on his perceptions of the students and they adored him. He challenged them to think and taught them to read through texts that were not only familiar to them, but allowed them to reflect back in time and make sense of who they were then and there and their transition within a narrative discourse (*One Day of Life*) that was familiar to them.

In this next and final chapter I summarize my findings for my entire study, offer conclusions, and implications for research, policy, and practice.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Introduction

Through this dissertation study, I considered the context of education for one specific Latino/a population – Salvadorans/Central Americans in Washington, D.C. – and how they drew from their larger social context to make sense of classroom texts and discussions. I situate my work within a larger body of research that seeks to understand inequitable educational outcomes for Latino/a students in terms of their experiences in school and their day-to-day lives. In Chapters 5 and 6 specifically, I illustrated how study participants drew from their experiences participating in a transnational social field to navigate their day-to-day lives and make sense of academic texts. As youth participate in such social contexts they make meaning of texts, learn new information and perspectives, and may move beyond the familiar into unfamiliar conceptual and content terrains. In other words, it was through opportunities to draw from what they knew as they navigated the unknown, that texts became meaningful for these young people. What is more, since the youth who participated in this study so often situated themselves and their ways of knowing in terms of the ongoing global practices that they engaged, I focused my analysis on the transnational context of their lives.

Thus in the pages that follow, I first conclude this study by summarizing my findings and analyses in terms of each major research question I posed at the onset of the study. I then move on to the research and practice implications of this study. As I discuss

implications for pedagogical practice, I address what it meant to create learning spaces comprised of students' transnational funds of knowledge and academic ways of knowing. I also explore how educators might utilize elements of this study in their day-to-day work with students. Finally, I conclude this study by offering implications for educational policy.

Summary of Analytical Strands

By way of reviewing the main analytical strands for this study, I present each major research question followed by an overview of my findings and analysis related to that question.

1.) In what ways do young adult, Salvadoran/Central American migrants experience transnational dynamics in their day-to-day lives and personal histories?

In chapter 5, I discussed how the youth who participated in this study experienced transnationalism through concrete practices with members of their social networks in the DC metro area, El Salvador/Central America, and throughout the Salvadoran/Central American diaspora. More specifically, these youth engaged communication and media practices to maintain connections and gain information related to members of their networks. Through their social networks they also maintained a sense of solidarity with their country of origin and accessed resources related to their well being such as vital information about jobs and their immigration status. These youth not only received material and psychic resources from members of their social networks, they also generated resources through economic and informational remittances. For example, they

sent funds and conveyed information that helped sustain relatives in their countries of origin.

In Chapter 5, I also discussed how the interstitial and ongoing nature of these concrete practices enabled youth to participate in a transnational social field (see for example Guarnizo and Smith, 1998). They participated in this field economically as they worked at jobs in D.C. and sent a portion of their earnings to family members and acquaintances in their home countries. They also sought out news sources (based in D.C. and El Salvador) to keep abreast of current events in their home countries. Through these practices they came to orient themselves in terms of transnational dynamics and interpreted many facets of their lives through a transnational lens. That is, they often made meaning within their lives by referring back and forth between life in El Salvador and life in the United States. Therefore, I use the term transnational social field to signal how these youth experienced transnationalism as a combination of practices and the associated meanings they assigned to various elements of their lives.

This transnational social field was also important in terms of how they positioned themselves and framed their sense of identity. Within their utterances about their personal histories, they constructed identities and subjectivities in-between nations. That is, they described themselves as particular kinds of people in El Salvador versus the United States and in the back and forth exchanges between these places. For example, they positioned themselves as people who leveraged resources, provided resources, and navigated across national borders. Likewise, they positioned themselves as social actors in an urban city and national space where they had limited economic, educational, political, and, at times familial resources. However, within this transnational social field they saw themselves as

resourceful and in many ways were resourceful. Thus they experienced transnationalism as a series of processes and meanings that appeared to be part of how they maintained a sense of self in a context where they felt marginalized in so many ways. Within the transnational social field they had more of a sense of agency than as immigrants and/or rural Salvadorans or urban Salvadorans of limited means. However they also experienced marginalization within this field and identified their marginalization within both national spaces through this field.

Within this field they also experienced transnationalism by reasoning through a comparative lens where they constantly compared and contrasted their lives here versus there. Thus, they developed dual frames of reference in terms of the transnational dynamics of their lives. For example, they questioned day-to-day events and academic texts by invoking their experiences in El Salvador as compared to those in Washington, D.C. They also often issued critiques, for example of political figures, by drawing evidence from their lives in two or more national spaces.

Finally, as they experienced transnationalism as social actors who engaged in global practices and ways of knowing, they were also working class people in this transnational social field and were acutely aware of structural inequities within and between both national spaces. Therefore, their critical comments were often articulated at the nexus of experiences in two nation states, and global economic structures that pushed them towards the margins in both national spaces.

In sum, these youth participated in transnational social fields by maintaining connections, seeking information, offering resources and sustaining a sense of solidarity. They also made meaning of their lives in terms of these transnational social fields. That

is, they conveyed meanings as they positioned themselves in particular ways and as particular kinds of people. Similar to the material resources they accessed and generated through this social field, their transnational experiences served as a knowledge resource for them in their day-to-day lives and their classroom-based learning. Finally, as they conveyed these meanings and subjectivities, they also described or demonstrated particular ways of knowing. In this next section, I summarize how they drew from these practices and meanings as they engaged their classroom activities.

2.) How did student research participants call upon these experiences in their classroom-based literacy activities?

Through the various transnational practices that these young adults engaged, they acquired particular bodies of information. For example, as they sent remittances to relatives in El Salvador and other Central American countries, they participated in global economic transactions, though it is unclear whether they had a meta-understanding of these global economic processes. Similarly, through their experiences working in these two national spaces, they gained understandings of the distinct and interconnected United States and Salvadoran labor markets. Perhaps the most salient examples of this distinction were the contrasting rewards and costs associated with each labor market. These rewards and costs were personal to them as they experienced the value of their own labor power in both national contexts by earning dollars a day in one context and dollars an hour in the other. Finally, through their own lived experiences, and learning from those of their peers, they moved toward understanding how social class systems operated in the contrasts between rural and urban communities within El

Salvador/Central America and between those communities and their urban communities in the United States.

Through their lived experiences, these youth also garnered a keen understanding of the dynamics of transnational migration. They understood these dynamics because they lived them, but may not have been able to name them. For example, they understood migration in terms of economic processes and the labor market within and between each country. They also understood what it meant to participate in a democracy by staying informed of the issues that affected themselves and members of their communities (here and there). At the same time they referred to how they were silenced within that democracy. They revealed an understanding of electoral politics in transnational perspective as they talked about voting patterns in El Salvador versus the United States. Perhaps more important, they understood these political issues within a transnational frame, for example, through reading local D.C. newspapers and Salvadoran news online, they kept abreast of immigration policies in terms of the impact of those policies on their lives. They also understood their own civic marginality in the U.S. as individuals with Temporary Protective Status.

Finally, they experienced educational systems in transnational perspective as they experienced school in El Salvador, albeit for some intermittently, in contrast to schooling in the United States. What is more, through their conversations with friends and classmates in the U.S., they came to understand their distinct experiences of schooling in their home countries. Those students who lived in urban areas in El Salvador/Central America, had access to consistent and more rigorous educational settings, whereas those who lived in rural areas had less access to formal education and these students came to

understand these distinctions within the transnational classroom spaces they created together with their teachers in the United States. Thus, through comparing their experiences within each national space and between each country, these students acquired a broader understanding of social structures (e.g. economic, political, and educational) from different vantage points and in different national contexts.

In addition to knowledge in terms of economics, politics, and education, these youth came to understand what it meant to be a member of a Salvadoran diaspora. As they communicated with friends, family members and acquaintances they met online, they came to understand the extent of Salvadoran communities throughout the world and how those friends and online acquaintances experienced those places and spaces.

Whereas in this section, I discussed the particular bodies of information these youth acquired through their transnational practices, in this next section I emphasize the intellectual processes they engaged in order to acquire that knowledge.

Habits of Mind

The youth who participated in this research demonstrated habits of mind reflecting the global social fields of their lives. In the realities of living lives based in one national space yet constantly referring to another, they became accustomed to comparing and contrasting their lives in terms of these spaces. Moreover, they often responded to texts by invoking those contrasts. Thus, it was within the contrasts between the national spaces of their lives and the scenes depicted in their academic texts that they made meaning of the written word.

Critical Transnational Framings

For some of these students, these ongoing practices, associated bodies of knowledge and ways of knowing, manifested as social critiques. As they discussed how they were positioned in one space in contrast to the other, they spoke to the marginalization in their lives. They may not have used the discourse of sociology or critical race theory, but they were analytical as they highlighted the power dynamics and inequities they lived in each national space and in the transactions between these spaces. This was not a neutral awareness of distinct realities in two national spaces, rather they experienced transnationalism, in part, as an understanding of the marginalization they experienced in-between and within each of these national spaces. I refer to this awareness as, *critical transnational framings*. They developed these framings in part through their experiences as immigrants in the U.S. and as targets of an ongoing anti-immigrant discourse in media and policy arenas. In addition, they (and their families) left their countries of origin, in part due to inequitable economic systems that did not allow them to support their families. Therefore, due to their social class status, many of these young people experienced transnationalism as a awareness of being in-between two nations because they were not fully included in either nation.

DuBois speaks to this sense of being in a space, yet not of place as a double consciousness:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un reconciled strivings; two

warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Date and page number)

Rather than a double-consciousness arising from being both an American and a Black person, these young-adult Salvadorans experienced “two-ness” as an awareness that their labor literally cleaned and built the buildings in the capitol of a nation embroiled over whether they should be allowed to even be there, never mind possess civil and human rights. And at the same time, the Salvadoran and U.S. governments and other global institutions negotiated policies and economic structures that facilitated investment of their remittances without attention to the physical and psychic costs of their journeys to the U.S. and the sacrifices they made within the United States (Pedersen, 2004; Shayne, 2006). Therefore, Salvadoran migrants navigated the contradiction of living in and literally building the buildings of the capital of a nation as they were relegated second-class status via “temporary” immigration policies. Thus, they were present and yet not fully recognized. Within the academic realm, this duality was part of their conscientizacao (Freire, 1970) and part of the critical lens they were developing as young people, workers, students, and in some cases as parents.

In sum, they moved toward a transnational critical consciousness “from below” with an eye toward the power dynamics enacted by power brokers “above” (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998). That is, their perceptions of opportunity and experiences of being denied opportunity occurred within a transnational context. They saw themselves as in-between in terms of the opportunity structure because they came here for “opportunity” yet because of class and immigration status could not fully take advantage of “opportunity.” Yet the opportunities were greater than in their home country.

3.) How did the content, pedagogical, and meaning making practices of this transnational classroom intersect to bring about engaging moments for these youth and their teachers and what were the immediate social and academic consequences.

As I have discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, these youth participated in transnational social fields, accessed bodies of information and in the process they developed particular habits of mind. When they read texts they drew from these habits of mind and funds of knowledge to make sense of the texts. That is, their funds of knowledge were often generated within the transnational social fields of their lives. In terms of social consequences, they constantly made meaning in terms of the contrasts between the different national spaces of their lives. This meaning making included defining and positioning themselves and others in their lives through transnational framings. At times these framings enabled them to position themselves as more resourceful within their transnational social field, whereas at other time affirming their own position entailed rejecting others as not being authentic members of their community due to their country of origin or their age at the time of migration.

In terms of academic consequences, through my analysis in Chapter 6 and somewhat in Chapter 5, I demonstrated how the intersection of teacher prompts, students' experiences, and particular fictional and expository texts brought about these transnational classroom contexts. This context was often engaging for the student participants of this research and that engagement was often framed in terms of larger and personal transnational dynamics. And yet, this engagement occurred on a continuum. Transnational topics and themes were not always engaging and sometimes elicited active

resistance. What is more, less explicitly transnational moments were engaging at times. However, by and large, the level of engagement was higher and deeper in this setting when the topics at hand were transnational in nature. By deeper engagement I refer to the ways students evoked intertextual juxtapositions by weaving together narratives from each other's personal histories as well as the narratives embedded within the novels they read in class. They also engaged at a deeper level by calling up evidence from news sources, examples from their lived experiences, and constantly comparing and contrasting to describe current events in their home countries and construct arguments.

As I state above, this classroom context was largely prompted through teacher's questions and their selected texts. And yet, at times students co-facilitated this process of a transnational dialogue. At other times they re-negotiated some of the conversations as they pressed for the rationale behind certain assignments. Finally, these transnational classroom moments could not have been as enacted without the students' own experiences and active participation.

As I discussed throughout Chapter 6, these young adults brought forth their experiences participating in a transnational social field, as for example: workers, keepers and tellers of cultural narratives, and civic participants, to their interpretations of academic texts and writing assignments. For example, as civic participants they read *The Washington Post*, *El Tiempo Latino* (a D.C. based newspaper with a focus on translocal Latino/a communities) as well as Salvadoran websites to keep abreast of current events in Central America such as natural disasters and the status of immigration policies within the United States. Then when they read newspaper accounts in class they called up data they acquired from their out of school reading and discussions. They also interpreted

fictional accounts in novels by drawing from their lived experiences and familiar cultural narratives in both contexts.

Implications

This study was designed as an ethnographic project to understand the meanings that young Latino/as brought to their classroom-based experiences. Therefore, I aim to contribute to knowledge in the field of education and discipline of sociology. However, there are also implications for research and practice that I discuss in the following sections.

Research

My findings and analysis build upon several threads within the research literature. Thus in this next section I discuss how this dissertation contributes to *funds of knowledge* and literacy research as well as transnational studies.

Funds of knowledge.

To recap, funds of knowledge are the bodies of knowledge people acquire and learn through sets of relationships in their day-to-day lives. This is knowledge vital to the functions of their households and communities. For example, in a rural community funds of knowledge might be framed by the ways of knowing and critical information necessary to run a family farm. Thus the *funds* research examines how and what people, often working class Latino/a youth, learn within the social context of their lives through their relationships with family and community members. My work contributes to the *funds* research by examining the day-to-day practices and meanings of young adults within the transnational social context of their lives. I also offer further insights into the

types of experiences, knowledge, and ways of knowing students derived from the transnational dynamics that were vital to their lives.

My work offers a nuanced understanding of young peoples funds of knowledge as I examine not only the transnational social context of youth, but also how the content and extent of one's knowledge depends on their age. That is, these youth experienced the transnational social fields of their lives distinctly as young adults versus their younger peers and siblings. As young children living in El Salvador they benefited from remittances sent by their parents and other family members residing in the U.S. However, as young-adults, residing in Washington, D.C., it was their labor that prompted the sustenance and at times emigration of their relatives in El Salvador and other parts of Central America. The dollars they earned in the United States enabled them to provide resources, even as their labor may have been exploited in this context. Therefore, even as they experienced marginalization in both national spaces, and were conscious of this marginalization, they also operated from a place of agency. At the same time, as young people who were still accountable to their parents and who were still dependent on family members, they were not free agents earning money and fully choosing how they would spend it. So even with the relative agency they enacted as young adults, most did not operate with the full benefits of adulthood.

Interwoven with age, I also explore how social space impacts the content of the knowledge one derives from their funds (see Moje, 2004). For example, these youth acquired particular forms of knowledge from their childhoods in rural spaces (e.g. caring for farm animals, working in agriculture, and hearing legends). By contrast, as young adults they acquired distinct forms of knowledge from residing in the urban context of

Washington, D.C. versus their rural or urban childhoods in Central America. Thus it was not only the transnational context of these youth's lives that influenced their funds of knowledge, but how that context was mediated by urban versus rural resources in different national spaces³². In this next section, I explore the contributions of this dissertation study in terms of the relationship between the context of students' lives and the ways they made meaning of the texts in their lives.

Context-text-meaning making.

This dissertation study builds on the idea that young people come to understand the written word by not only decoding print text, but by invoking images, experiences, and understandings from their day-to-day lives to construct meanings of the words and phrases they read. By illustrating how these young people brought forth their experiences from El Salvador and perspectives as transnational actors to respond to, interpret, and critique the novels and expository texts they read in school, I hope to contribute another layer to the scholarship examining this relationship between social context, texts, meaning making for youth (see for example Moje, 2000).

In addition to the intersections between text, context, and meaning making, my study elucidates how particular texts were powerful to youth in part due to the sociohistorical and spatial contexts of these narratives (Soja, 1996). Several of the novels they read in class were set in spaces familiar to these youth and therefore provided them opportunities to call up elements of their personal histories as well as their sociopolitical histories. For example, the historical novels by Manlio Argueta, not only allowed them to make connections between their own discrete memories and the memories of their peers

³² See Chapter 5 for discussion of urban versus rural contrasts within the transnational social field of these students' lives.

(the students' texts), but to situate those memories within a larger narrative put forth by a published author and historical narratives highlighted by their teacher. In this way these youth had a chance to affirm and deepen their understandings of the past within a larger historical context.

The meanings students made of their texts were not limited to what they drew from their own lives and those of their peers. At the intersections between the context of a given novel and the context of their life stories their teachers also challenged them to think beyond their experiences and/or add to their memories about their countries with other narratives reflecting seminal events from the past. This is an important point, because while it is important that school be a place where young people are affirmed and make connections between their lived experiences and academic content, if those connections do not lead students to new understandings and further content knowledge, then the educational process has failed them.

Transnationalism.

This dissertation also contributes to studies of transnationalism by examining the intersections between transnational structures (e.g. inter-dependent national economic systems) and the agency of these youth (e.g. sending remittances). Building upon studies that examine the meanings of transnational processes for social actors in terms of their day-to-day practices and imaginaries (see for example: Flores, 2000; Sanchez, 2007, Faustich-Orellana, 2001), through this study, I have also analyzed how those processes became a fund that young people drew from to navigate academic literacy practices.

I also situate my work within this research literature by exploring the meanings of transnational dynamics for working class young adults – versus older adults or children –

and what these processes mean in the learning that young people do. Because of their age and social class status many of these young adults were positioned at a nexus comprised of work, school, and family networks. For example, their parents might be forging a sense of place and surviving in D.C. through their labor as construction workers, cleaners, or their own entrepreneurial efforts. Similarly, these young people engaged in the same or similar wage-earning work, yet they also articulated the meaning of this work in their classrooms. Thus they were forging a sense of place through living in the District and building social networks, but also establishing themselves through their transnational literacy practices and naming their realities—that is, they were writing and reading a sense of place. (Freire, 1970).

Identity.

While not a focus of my analysis, my work has implications for identity research. The relationship between young people's transnational experiences and sense of identity and subjectivity is also an area for further research. Through this dissertation study, I have explored how the young-adults who participated in this research were positioned (and at time positioned themselves) as Latinos, Hispanics, Central Americans, and immigrants. They in turn intermittently took on these identities in class discussions and as they positioned themselves within the transnational social fields of their lives. However, as they described their lives, shared their memories and offered interpretations of academic texts, they also revealed far more nuanced subject positions. For example, they described how they saw themselves as not only Salvadoran, but rural and urban Salvadorans. They noted the differences between those who migrated as young children, like Yalila and those who ventured to the U.S. as young adolescents. And as they spoke

and wrote about their lives in Washington, D.C., El Salvador, and the transnational social field in-between these places, they affirmed the hybrid nature of their subjectivities. They were actively engaged in the day-to-day events and activities of their family members in El Salvador/Central America as they were actively working, going to school, and building relationships in DC. Therefore, as they lived transnationally, they affirmed what it means to cultivate a hybrid identity within a transnational social field. While I do not think they would identify as “American” per se. They lived their lives and called upon the past and present in ways that were integrative, versus a trajectory where they moved toward a singular “American” identity by negating facets of their Salvadoran identity.

Finally, in terms of their transnational identities, the *national* was important because these youth framed their lives by referring to “home” in national terms. When they said, “In my country...” they referred to El Salvador or Honduras, not necessarily the nation-state, but the experiences, memories, family members and *cariño* associated with that nation. Therefore, while they explored and debated the meanings and nuances of Salvadoran and Latino/a identities, in terms of social class status, educational background, and urban versus rural residence, their Salvadoran identity was still very salient to them.

Classroom Practice

This study also has important implications for practice. As I have argued and illustrated through out this dissertation study, students lived transnationally in multiple ways, and were socially situated in terms of the global meanings they derived from their day-to-day practices. Thus learning more about how young immigrants experience transnationalism may also help educators to weave their students’ experiences into the

classroom context. As educators become aware of the multiple ways students navigate in their daily lives, they can design assignments that allow their students to compare and contrast, narrate and name their experiences.

In the context of the present dissertation study, the student participants of this research also experienced a transnational context in their classroom through the literacy practices designed by their teachers to engage them, speakers invited to the class and school to share their experiences in multiple national contexts, and from each others' experiences with different countries. Thus, social spaces were cultivated at their school transnational nuances, in part through individuals who offered these students conduits to El Salvador and other Central American countries.

Through the research for this study, I learned from these students in part due to the social spaces created by the teachers and students. My analysis of how students' transnational lives became a part of the literacy practices of one classroom could inform how other teachers might bring together their students' transnational experiences with classroom texts and literacy practices.

These connections between students' narratives, experiences and their academic texts could become a strategy for supporting youth as they transition to the United States. As one example, teachers might attend to the meanings of their students' memories and how those memories are situated within larger sociohistorical narratives. At one level such an approach could render reading meaningful to youth. This approach could also be a way of helping them to locate their own historical roots and understand the sociopolitical and socioeconomic dynamics of their migration to the U.S. And at yet

another level, such an approach could be about creating contexts for young people to acquire a sense of roots in a new place through text and discussion.

What is more, teachers may also learn from their students' texts. And by texts I mean those narratives that youth bring to the classroom, such as the legends, as well as books set in their countries of origin and/or feature characters with similar life experiences and ways of speaking. These texts could be a way of engaging students, as well as a way of coming to know them, their interests and what matters to them. Through such understandings teachers can also help students to make connections to texts that might not be directly related to their lives or those of their ancestors. By learning from embedded themes in literature reflecting their students' sociocultural and sociohistorical lives, teachers could draw from those themes to introduce their students to authors and literature that might seem less immediately relevant to them and thereby extend their students' knowledge base.

Through my study, I also emphasize that creating opportunities for youth to engage texts that are directly relevant to their lived experiences is not always a linear or smooth process. As I have stated through out this dissertation, these youth often engaged texts about their countries of origin by bringing their transnational experiences and reflections to the fore. As they went back and forth between utterances about each others' home countries and brought forth memories of their childhoods in El Salvador/Central America, the very conversations about these texts became transnational. However, these same memories and experiences were situated within painful moments in their lives. For example, a salient transnational experience for many of them was the reality of long stretches of separation from their parents and other family members, whereas, others

shared memories of the lengthy and arduous journeys made to the United States at a young age. Therefore, prompting discussions about the transnational dynamics of students' lives did not always bring about vibrant critical discussions. At times these youth choose not to share a personal anecdote or even became silent if the topic was too close to their personal histories. Like any responsive pedagogical approach, there was no formula or script that the teachers called upon. And the success of engaging these youth through their transnational experiences was mediated by the relationships of trust teachers were able to establish with their students. That is, it was the way that Ernesto not only choose novels based in El Salvador and with Salvadoran and migrant characters, but the way he choose books with dialogue written in a discourse familiar to the students and the way he made reference to that discourse that made his pedagogy responsive.

Similarly, Nate was responsive to his students by listening to the issues and narratives that resonated with his students, and presented them with representative texts and/or asked for their opinions regarding those issues as a means of engaging them. Thus, through this research, I argue that not only was the transnational context of their lives vital to how these youth made sense of academic texts, but responsive pedagogical practices were as important as the texts themselves and the experiences youth brought to those texts.

As I have discussed above and illustrated in Chapters 5 and 6, young people experienced transnationalism and acquired knowledge through these experiences. This knowledge was vital to their own livelihood and the sustenance of members of their social networks. In this way they drew from their experiences and relationships for various forms of knowledge. However, it was through the classroom spaces they created

with their teachers that they were actually able to activate this knowledge toward academic ends. This is important because at the intersection between lived experience and text young people stand to expand their knowledge bases in ways that could lead to future opportunities. Opportunities in terms of the ways of thinking necessary for professional or semi professional jobs, higher education opportunities, as well as the credentials associated with further opportunities. However without teachers to mediate these connections and help students to draw from their social context, as they make sense of academic texts, young people will likely not learn as much or think as deeply about their own lives and the content of school texts. For example, through research assignments that help students understand their lived experiences within a larger context and narrative writing assignments that prompt them to write their own life stories as they compare those personal histories to those of their peers and/or characters in books, student gain opportunities to understand and broaden their own experiences within a larger historical and literary context.

In a transnational world it is not only important to work with kids so that they are aware of their own perspectives and analyses. But as we work with them to deepen their knowledge base, we learn from their global understandings. In this next section I explore how those understandings might contribute to society at large in addition to the engaging young people in academic literacy practices.

Policy

Research about transnational dynamics also occurs within a contemporary (and reoccurring) public discourse. In our current times, the popular discourse around immigration is often framed in terms of deficits. For example, at the time of data

collection, in the suburbs surrounding D.C., local municipalities were passing (and contesting) resolutions to explicitly deny public services to undocumented immigrants. The discussions held at town meetings related to these proposals in many ways symbolize the diverse and conflicting perspectives within this public discourse around immigration. While a thorough analysis of this discourse is far beyond the scope of this dissertation study, these public perspectives are relevant to the present study because the youth who participated in this study not only migrated to the physical space of the DC area, but a discursive space within which they were targets. When the contributions of immigrants enter into these public discussions, they are positioned in terms of their work and not the ways of knowing and the knowledge that comes from their day-to-day practices. However, their knowledge is important for several reasons. Firstly, the labor of the very people who are the targets of public critique, supports public institutions. Secondly, the young people who migrated to the US are members of our public education system and therefore, as educators and researchers we need to continue to figure out how to equip them with the skills, knowledge, and ways of thinking to survive, navigate and contribute to their local communities and beyond. Finally, because we live in global times, the ways of knowing of immigrant youth are important to the economic and political well-being of the U.S. as a nation. Their perspectives could influence the very economic, communicative, and political dynamics that so often framed or constrained their lives.

On a final note, creating engaging transnational context for youth with similar life stories as my research participants and youth in general could be vital to their overall educational experience and preparation for life as global citizens. However these transnational contexts do not supplant the processes of learning how to read, write, and

learn the English language. Engaging classroom contexts are critical to preparing youth to participate in this democracy, however engagement cannot be achieved at the expense of learning skills and concepts. For example, these engaging moments do not take the place of grammar and sentence structure lessons. This type of learning setting is one aspect of the educational landscape for Latino/a students, im/migrant students, and border crossers more broadly. Furthermore, factors such as teachers who are well prepared, small class sizes, and well-resourced schools are equally important. My overall argument is that as we consider how to improve the overall quality of education and level of educational outcomes for Latino/a students, educators need to provide engaging contexts within which their students may learn. This entails coming to know one's students and in ever global and transnational world that we live in, this means understanding how many of our students live transnational lives and draw upon those experiences to make sense of their day-to-day lives and, within a responsive classroom setting, to make sense of their academic texts.

Appendix A: Classroom Observation Foci

Classroom Practices and Interactions

1. What are the routines in this classroom?
2. What are the routines/conventions around literacy?
3. What is the relationship between iconic representations of text (e.g. pictures on the board and/or in-class assignments distributed by the teacher) and literacy?
4. How does the teacher use the board and/or other visuals intended for the entire class (e.g. dry erase boards or posters)?
5. How do students respond to these whole class visual displays?
6. How is literacy represented in the physical environment of the classroom?
7. How are students literacy practices reflected in the classroom physical environment?
8. What is the relationship between the spoken word and written word in this classroom?
9. How are the Spanish and English languages used in this classroom?
10. Are there patterns that characterize teacher: student interactions? Student: student interactions?

Appendix B: Teacher Interview Protocol

Background Information

1. Can you start by telling me something about why you became a teacher...
2. How long have you been at this school?
3. How do you think your students would describe you to someone who doesn't know you? PROBE: What are some of your hobbies...things you enjoy doing when you're not in school?
4. Where are you from? Where did you grow up?
5. How long have you been teaching?
6. How would you describe the path you took to become a teacher?
7. What do you enjoy most about teaching here at the New Pathways Charter School? What are some of the challenges?
8. How would you describe the New Pathways Charter School to someone who had never been here?
9. What attracted you to working here?
10. Do different students have different schedules?
11. What's the mission of this school?
12. What are some of your goals for your students for this year?

Perceptions of Students

1. How would you describe your students to someone who had never met them?
2. What are some of their out-of-school interests? In-school interests?
3. In what ways are parents involved in the education of their children here?
4. Do you have a sense of the kinds of music they like to listen to?

5. What role do you think music plays in their lives? Probe: In what ways have you observed this?
6. Have you observed students listening to different types of music?
7. What are some of the things they have taught you?
8. What gets challenging about teaching your students?

Literacy Practices

1. How would you define literacy
2. In what ways do you use literacy in your day-to-day life?
3. What kinds of writing do you do in your day-to-day life?
4. What kinds of books do you like to read? Are there other kinds of text you like to read? Anything else you find that you read on a regular basis?
5. What about your students, how do you think they use literacy in their day-to-day lives?
6. What are some of your goals for their in-school literacy development?
7. What about goals for their writing specifically? Reading?
8. In what ways do you see them drawing from their out-of-school experiences in their in-school assignments?
9. Can you give me some examples of assignments or exercises you've done with the students to support their literacy development?
10. What are the different genres or types of writing students engage in here at New Pathways?
11. Do you think there are different expectations for students' writing in different classes? How so?

12. What about in terms of their school-based texts—how do you think the reading students do is different from class to class?

Language

1. How would you describe your students' language capabilities? PROBE: Can you give me some examples of how you see this in your day-to-day lives PROBE: At school? In the community? At home? At work?
2. What role does language play in their lives?
3. How do you think it (language) influences their in-school experiences? Decisions about their futures? PROBE: Have they ever talked to you about these kinds of issues?
4. How do they feel about learning English? What about maintaining or improving their Spanish language capabilities? PROBE: Examples?
5. What do you see as the relationship between students' language capabilities and their literacy skills?
6. What do you think is the school's philosophy on the relationship between literacy and language for the student body? PROBE: How do you see this? Are there instances when administrators and/or other teachers have discussed this?

Appendix C: Student Interview Protocol

I begin with: I'm a student at the University of Michigan and I'm trying to learn more about the relationship between what young people learn outside side of school and what they learn in school. Your responses to the questions in this interview will help me get a better sense of the interests and backgrounds of the students in this school.

Personal Background Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself...If one of your close friends were describing you what would they say about you?
2. How old are you?
3. What grade are you in?
4. What part of Washington D.C. or what neighborhood do you live in?
5. How many brothers...sisters do you have?
6. Who stays/lives in your home?

School Context

1. Tell me about your school.
2. How would you describe the Next Step Charter school to someone who's never been here? PROBE: What else can you tell me about this school? teachers? the kind of work you do? the kinds of things you all do in class?
3. How long have you been at this school?
4. Tell me about when you decided to attend this school?
5. Who's decision was it for you to come here? Why?
6. What do you like best about this school? PROBE: What else do you like about it?

7. One of the things I'm trying to learn about is how your school is different or the same as other schools. Have you attended other schools?
8. Have some of your classmates attended different schools? PROBE: Tell me about the differences between this school and others.

Community Context/Day-to-Day Experiences

1. How would you describe your community to someone who's never been here before?
2. Do you work? PROBES: Where? In your community or outside? Do (Would) you prefer to work in your community? Why?
3. What kind of job? PROBES: Why do you work? Do you enjoy your job?
4. What are some of the things you enjoy doing when you are not in school (or working)?
5. What do you like to do for fun?
6. What do other people your age in your community like to do for fun?
7. Do you think music is an important part of your community? How about reading? Writing? PROBES: How can you see this? OR How do you know this? OR How would someone just visiting your community know this?
8. How are your community and your school similar? Different? PROBES: Do you feel different in your neighborhood as opposed to when you're in school? How so?.

Literacy Practices

1. What do you think your life would be like if you could not read or write?
2. Do you like to read?
3. Do you like to write?
4. Do you like to listen to music?

5. How would you define the term literacy? OR What does the word literacy mean to you? What does illiteracy mean to you? (Depending on how they answer, I will say, “some would say literacy is reading and writing written texts...”)
6. In what ways do you use literacy (or insert their definition here) in your day-to-day life?
7. In what ways do you use writing in your day-to-day life...PROBE: when you are not in school?
8. In what ways do you use reading in your day-to-day life... PROBE: when you are not in school?
9. When I say the word “text” what does that mean to you?
10. How would you describe the texts in your day-to-day life PROBES: ...in your house? ...in the community? What kinds of things do you usually read or write in your day-to-day life?
11. How about in school...How is literacy a part of your life in-school?
12. In what ways do you use reading in school?
13. How is the reading you do in _____ class different from the reading you do in _____ class?
14. How about writing? In what ways do you use writing at school?
15. How is the writing you do in _____ class different from the writing you do in _____ class?
16. What kinds of music do you like to listen to?
17. Do you ever listen to music in school? in class? Tell me about that. What kind of music?

18. Who are some of your favorite singers or musicians?
19. What about your parents or older relatives, what kinds of music do they like?
20. How do you feel about their music?
21. How about your brothers and sisters, who do they listen to?
22. Do you think music can tell a story? PROBE: How can music tell stories? Does any of the music you listen to have stories in them? What kinds of stories?
23. Do you think there is a relationship between literacy and music? If so, can you give me an example from the music you listen to.

Language

1. What language do you and your family usually speak at home?
2. How about when you hang out with your friends? In school? In your community?
3. Do you speak Spanish and English at school? (If yes, then continue)
4. Do you think you speak more Spanish in some classes? Why do you think that happens?
5. Do you think you tend to speak more English in some of your classes? Why do you think that happens?
6. How about when you are in this building, but not in class, do you speak more English or Spanish? Why do you think that you do that?
7. What about reading and writing...what language do you feel most comfortable reading in? How about writing?
8. Do you think there is a relationship between how many languages you know and reading and writing?
9. Other suggestions for other questions:

10. What are your teachers doing to help you to become a better reader? writer?
11. If you were a teacher what would you do to improve your students' literacy skills?
Why do you think that would be effective? Would you use music? How do you think music can be used in the classroom?

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ⁱ The low rate of high school completion for Latino/a students is one factor within a larger socioeconomic portrait of the majority of Latino/a students in the United States. In terms of socioeconomic status, the majority of Latino/a families earn low to moderate incomes and reside in low income communities with lower tax bases (Garcia, 2001; National The Center for Educational Statistics, 2003; Secada, W. G.; Chavez, R.; Garcia, E.; Munoz, C. Oakes, J. Santiago, I. & Slavin, R., 1998). Latino/a youth also tend to go to older, under-resourced schools (Anyon, 2005). Additionally, Latino/a students are disproportionately suspended or expelled, and retained in the same grade for more than one year (NCES, 2003). These are some of the factors that illustrate how systemic inequities manifest among Latino/a students. (Darder, 1997; Garcia, 2001; Secada, 1998; U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

ⁱⁱ The demographics of Columbia Heights and Mt. Pleasant are changing as the area quickly “develops” with high priced condominiums, a new Target store, and Starbuck’s coffee shops among other amenities targeted at residents with high incomes. Since the time of my data collection, the population demographics have shifted toward a much higher income bracket and one that is less racially and economically diverse. What is more, the physical presence of particular groups differs from who owns much of the property in this area. Therefore, even though the population demographics are shifting the racial and ethnic composition of the school-age population in this area has remained fairly steady over the past decade.

ⁱⁱⁱ These shifts in community may also be seen in who is allowed to claim space in the neighborhood. As one example, in 2002 an article in the Washington Post described an incident that was prompted by altars arranged on a neighborhood sidewalk (public space) in Mt. Pleasant. The altar paid homage to young people who had recently been murdered with a tree teddy bear, liquor bottles and dried flowers as a remembrance of each youth placed around a tree. The Post journalist documented how these altars sparked protest by “newer” neighbors with comments like, “Normal people don’t mourn that way.” Soon the altars were removed by city sanitation workers accompanied by police escort (Dvorak, 2002 cited in Fraser, 1993). I present this example as a moment of how the contact zone (Pratt, 1992) between established, primarily working class residents and their upper class neighbors functioned. Therefore, while Latino immigrants are increasingly present in numbers, gentrification has meant that the cost of housing is pushing them out as well as ongoing discursive moves that signal who feels entitled to claim neighborhood spaces (Fraser, 1993; Modan, 2006).