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Centering Transborder Students: Perspectives on Identity, Languageing and Schooling Between the U.S. and Mexico

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Undocumented families’ rates of repatriation to Mexico from the United States have risen throughout the Obama administration, and this trend will likely increase under Donald Trump. This study describes the experiences of Mexican-born youth who grew up in the United States and are back in Mexico. While these children are participants in their families’ migration, their input is rarely sought in decisions to leave or return to a country. This article shares transborder students’ voices on their struggles to find their identities as Mexican, American, or some combination of the two. They reflect on their schooling experiences across countries, and how these challenges are compounded when they are new to learning in Spanish or indigenous languages in Mexico.

Undocumented and mixed status immigrant families in the United States are entering an era of increased fear and uncertainty (Blitzer, 2016). The possibility of going back to their home country by force or circumstance is a reality they must confront within the context of a Trump administration. Families have faced return migration for many years, as even under the Obama administration more immigrants of Mexican heritage left the United States for Mexico than came into the country (González-Barrera, 2015). These statistics are useful in revealing migration patterns, but they stop short of illuminating the human experiences behind this phenomenon. Children and youth are participants in the migration(s) of their families, yet their input is rarely sought in these decisions (Orellana, 2009). Instead, they are just told—if they are old enough to understand—that they will be moving from one place to another. Some are willing and excited participants, whereas others strongly protest separation from family, friends, and their life as they know it (Dreby, 2015).

The rates of immigrants in the United States returning to Mexico due to deportation or difficult circumstances related to being undocumented have been increasing (González-Barrera, 2015). Children and youth who are born in Mexico—as well as those born in the United States—are finding themselves in Mexico, a country they barely know or remember. This is not a new phenomenon (Hamann & Zúñiga, 2011; Zúñiga & Hamann, 2009; Zúñiga, Hamann, & Sánchez García, 2006), but one that is receiving more attention given the elevated numbers of U.S.-raised students who are in Mexican schools from the United States and the discourse and actions of the Trump administration, which has promised to deport an unprecedented number of undocumented immigrants (Fox, 2015).

This article centers the voices of students who experience “transborder lives,” the title of the seminal text by Lynn Stephen (2007). Although these Mexican born and U.S.-raised youth lacked agency in these migrations, meaning they were unable to exercise their free will regarding whether to stay in one location or move to another, the transitions they experienced drastically impacted how they view the world. Students raised in the United States who are back in Mexico speak to three key areas associated with their childhoods: shifting identities, learning and losing named languages, and schooling across borders. This subgroup of students possesses multilingual and multicultural talents and are the agents who can best elaborate their binational views to inform educators and policy makers on ways to make their schooling on both sides of the border as seamless and supportive as possible.

Perspectives on Return Migration

Although often perceived to be linear, migration between nations can be cyclical. Return migration can be approached from a variety of perspectives that range from a focus on the individual to the national to transnational. Cassarino’s (2004) overview of the theories
that connect people’s movement and development is helpful in framing return migration. The neoclassical economics approach is focused on the inability of migrants to succeed financially in their new country. Their return is based solely on individual achievements, or lack thereof. There is no consideration for outside systemic structures that impact the extent to which one can reach their economic goals in a given nation. Going beyond the personal, the structural approach takes into account social and institutional aspects of “local power relations, traditions and values in the home country” (Cassarino, 2004, p. 259). For example, migrants may return due to challenges with integration or discrimination, which are not factors in their country of origin. Then, transnationalism goes further than the individual and the home nation context to the interrelationships migrants develop between countries. Specifically, the ties they build socially and economically that influence migration may also play a role in further movements across nations and borders when possible. Transnationalism concerns itself with the transitional identities and mobility of migrants who maintain social, political, and economic connections across nations without selecting one over another.

This study focuses on these childhoods through the voices of youth who reflect on their experiences across borders as bilingual and multicultural individuals whose lives were being dictated by policies—or the absence of them—and circumstances that impacted their migration and return.

Transnationalism is prevalent between the United States and Mexico, two nations that share a border and a long history of policies and practices that pull and push migrants, often simultaneously (Fernández-Kelly & Massey, 2007). When migrants move between nations there is more than just a crossing of a physical—albeit artificial—border (Stephen, 2007). Families literally and metaphorically traverse international and national borders, moving not only across countries, but also often within them. Students also navigate different school systems, cultures, and language borders and policies that dictate what can be spoken, when, where, and to whom (Gallo & Hornberger, 2017). These multiple and complex border crossings impact the lived experiences of students not only during, but well after they find themselves living in a different land. For these reason, I use the term “transborder” to refer to the students whose lives have centered on navigating borders.

These theories center on adults either making decisions or being forced to return. The assumption has been that children are simply “baggage” in these migrations (Orellana, 2009) or that these processes are not as difficult for them as for adults (Hatfield, 2010). Yet children view and experience migrations differently from adults, especially when it comes to their agency and to how they conceive of “home” (McKendrick, 2001). This study focuses on these childhoods through the voices of youth who reflect on their experiences across borders as bilingual and multicultural individuals whose lives were being dictated by policies—or the absence of them—and circumstances that impacted their migration and return.

Methods and Setting

Methodology

The findings presented here are part of a larger qualitative study that looks at how transborder students—some of whom are U.S.-born and others Mexican-born—acclimate to being (back) in Mexico (Maxwell, 1996). The study included students across elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels, with three students per level. Here, I consider the three Mexican-born high school-going youth that were a sub-set of the larger research study. The students were interviewed in a semi-structured format about their experiences migrating between Mexican and the United States (Silverman, 2000). Their parents and teachers were also interviewed, but, here, I focus on the voices of the students. Additionally, I was able to observe them in their English classes and served as a faculty advisor to a student group they formed called “The New Dreamers” (For more information on this group, see the film “Una Vida, Dos Países: Children and Youth (Back) in Mexico” via unavidathefilm.com). The students were given a choice regarding whether to conduct their interviews in English, Spanish, or bilingually. Each elected to respond in English, most likely because it is a language they feel very comfortable with and had grown accustomed to speaking with me.

To analyze the data, I recorded and transcribed the interviews and reviewed them for themes that occurred in the areas of identity, languaging, and schooling. I used grounded theory as the themes that naturally presented themselves across the interview data emerged and then were sub-divided into codes.
I, then, selected representative quotes that are illustrative of the students' experiences.

Context and Participants

The students all attend the same high school in a mid-sized town of about 20,000 people in the southern state of Oaxaca. The town has a significant indigenous population, some of whom speak the languages associated with their group, most often Zapotec. During the 2014–2015 year, the school had 365 students, of which 25 or nearly 7% had lived in the United States, while many more had familial ties there. Of these students, some spent a decade or more in the United States—like the students in this study—whereas others were U.S.-born, but spent the majority of their lives in Mexico, and everything in between. This town has strong connections to California, where the majority of residents or their family members have resided.

The three students in this study—Antonio, Marcela and Edwin—were all brought to the United States as toddlers between the ages of one to three and spent an average of a decade in the country. They were between 12–14 years old upon their return to Mexico and participated in this study 3 or 4 years after being back in Mexico. Each student originally migrated to California and remained in the state, with the exception of Antonio, whose family eventually moved to Florida.

While the students lived in the United States, they attended public elementary and middle schools and had little to no recollection of their lives in Mexico. Marcela and Antonio come from mixed status families, where some family members are U.S.-citizens and others are undocumented in the United States. Both have a younger U.S.-born sibling who has dual citizenship in the United States and Mexico. Marcela and Edwin are from homes where Zapotec is spoken by their parents and elders in their extended family. Each family returned due to circumstances related to being undocumented in the United States. Specifically, the inability to see aging parents/ grandparents for Marcela’s family, the economic challenges of raising a family as a single undocumented woman for Antonio’s family, and lack of access to healthcare for Edwin’s family. All three students found themselves in similar situations at the same high school. Here, they reflect on these experiences 3–4 years post-return.

Findings

Students who move between borders are forced to navigate different areas that shape who they are becoming as they head toward adulthood. Here, we see their views and experiences as they relate to identity, languaging, and schooling vis-à-vis their time in the United States and their return to Mexico. The findings take a comparative stance juxtaposing their lived realities on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Shifting Identities

Identities are fluid and dictated by a combination of internal and external societal perceptions that may change across contexts. The nation-state has a powerful role in shaping how one defines their position in the country. Governments grant political citizenship to some based on place of birth, lineage, and acceptance into a nation, creating a hierarchy of individuals that range from those who have access to rights and privileges and those who are barred from them (Mangual Figueroa, 2012). The U.S. government dictates when an immigrant is considered a naturalized citizen, legal permanent resident, or illegal alien, for example. However, one’s political citizenship is often in contrast to one’s national identity. Cultural citizenship is “a process of self-making and being made in relation to nation-states and transnational processes” (Ong, 1996, p. 737). Many transborder students experience a disconnection between their political and cultural citizenship, thereby feeling a sense of loss as to where they belong and come from. Transborder students often feel they are neither from here nor there as they navigate their place in the world and their sense of belonging between countries they may feel are their home(s), but where they are viewed as outsiders (Anderson & Solis, 2014).

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In the United States, political citizenship may not be a central factor for young children who are forging their identities. However, once they come to understand their status as undocumented and its implications, this becomes more central to their identity (Perez, 2011). Edwin, for example, started to rethink his place in the United States, where he had been living for as long as he could remember:
In the beginning I didn’t know that I was from Mexico, until one day my mom and dad told me that I came from there. I opened my eyes and realized that I’m not from this place, but it doesn’t mean I’m not home, to me it feels like home. My parents [also] told me I didn’t have papers. What they told me was to enjoy life here while we have it because we never know when we can go to Mexico and you can miss all this.

Edwin was unaware of his status; as he had been raised in the United States, he was under the impression that he had been born there, too. This conversation with his parents shook his conception of “home,” although he stayed firm that one’s place of birth does not directly correlate to where they belong. In addition to learning of his immigration status, Edwin was also warned that their life in the United States may not be permanent. This sentiment became a reality when Edwin’s dad injured his back on the job while climbing trees for a lumber company. With his father no longer able to support the family financially and lacking the necessary healthcare, they returned to their hometown in Mexico.

In the United States, Marcela took on a shifting identity that bridged the way she saw herself between home and school:

I identify myself in the USA like a Mexican-American because I wasn’t really into the Spanish culture and I didn’t really speak a lot of Spanish, but I was Mexican too because my parents are Mexican and they speak Spanish so I have that reason to be Mexican. When I heard the Spanish [at home with] my family I said I was Mexican. In my school I saw myself more American then Mexican.

Marcela conflates culture and language with ethnicity. In California, she lived in monoglossic contexts with only English being spoken at the highly diverse elementary and middle schools she attended, whereas Spanish was spoken at home. She equated the presence of English as being American and Spanish as being Mexican and her existence in these worlds as Mexican-American.

Being back in Mexico for a few years caused Marcela to drop the American from the way she self-identifies:

Now, I consider myself more Mexican because I don’t go to a school where everything starts with English, everything starts with Spanish so . . . I consider myself more Mexican.

Antonio comes from a mixed-status family. His U.S.-born brother, who is 3 years younger, has dual citizenship. Although his brother spent less time in the United States and does not speak English as fluently as Antonio, he is considered American by the U.S. government:

I didn’t have papers, but my brother does. I feel more American than Mexican. But he can go back as fast as he can. It’s not more or less [like that] for me. He has more opportunities just being American, a citizen.

Antonio recognizes that political citizenship trumps cultural citizenship (Ong, 1999). He understands that the U.S. passport his brother holds has implications for returning to live, work, and study in the United States, as well as the long-term opportunities and life chances available to his sibling, that for him will be significantly more challenging.

All the students talk about moments of feeling like they are along the continuum of being from nowhere to everywhere. Edwin elaborates this conundrum:

Sometimes I say I am not from here nor there. I don’t know where I belong. Sometimes I say I’m from Mexico. I have Mexican blood but I have the culture of the US. I feel like a little bit of everything.

Identity for transborder students shifts based on place, language, external definitions, and labels around citizenship. These students are still coming to terms with how they see themselves in comparison to how they are viewed from the outside and by government definitions.

**Learning and Losing Named Languages**

The process of migration requires people to expand their linguistic repertoire to more fully participate in the educational and economic sectors and to communicate across cultures. Individuals engage in languaging—“a process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (Swain, 2006, p. 98)—by pulling from features identified with named languages (Pennycook, 2010). Named languages, such as Spanish, Zapotec, or English, are social constructions that classify groups of speakers, rather than discrete categories defined on the basis of linguistic structure (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015). Language policies—official or de facto—dictate how named languages are enacted in a society, as well as the position and power they hold (Menken & García, 2010). These named languages shift between being viewed as a resource, right, or problem (Ruiz, 1984) depending on the context and speakers. Indigenous languages are generally considered a problem in nation-states, due to their perceived lower status, which often results in transborder students either resisting speaking those languages or denying their knowledge and connection to them (Perez & Vásquez, 2010).
Spanish, which is often considered a problem in U.S. contexts, is instead an expectation in Mexico, where it is an official language. English is a language of power across nations, while it is not the official language in either. These dynamics directly impact how transborder students speak across nations and which named languages they suppress or embrace in their homes, schools, and society.

The languaging practices of transborder students are constantly in flux as changes in place bring about changes in practice. For students from Oaxaca, the state in Mexico with the largest indigenous population, the use of Zapotec is prevalent in many families and communities. This is alongside the English that transborder students acquired in the United States and the Spanish that is used in Mexico and in their homes. Thus, many students oscillate between three languages as they cross borders (Perez, Vásquez, & Burie, 2016).

Edwin recalls how he generally speaks English to his younger brother, while his parents speak Spanish to their sons and Zapotec with one another. This was consistent in the United States, as well as after their return to Mexico. The primary aspect of language that changed was that of the school from only English in the United States to only Spanish in Mexico.

Edwin and Marcela both have roots in indigenous communities that speak Zapotec, and experienced increased exposure to it upon their return to Mexico. However, they exhibited different levels of acceptance of the named language. This is evidenced in the way Edwin responds to whether he would like to learn Zapotec. He says, “Well not really because I don’t see it like a benefit but it would mean I’m trilingual. The languages I really want to learn are French and Portuguese. I want to be more than trilingual.” Although his grandparents only speak Zapotec, Edwin, like many other students whose families speak an indigenous language at home, sees it as less valuable. He shows a preference toward learning a European language instead, even though it would have a limited use in his current surroundings. Instead, he understands the cultural capital or the inherent power and higher status associated with different named languages on a global scale (Bourdieu, 1990).

While Edwin and Antonio both take the prevailing disparaging view of indigenous languages as not worthy of an investment of their time and efforts, Marcela takes a different stance:

Zapotec is the first language in my hometown; the language our ancestors spoke first. It is a beautiful language that should not go extinct. In my hometown, what we do is preserve the language. My family speaks Zapotec, when my parents speak it, I understand what they are saying. With time Zapotec sticks to your head and you can learn it more and more.

It is perception rather than reality that dictates how transborder students view their Spanish language. Although they all learned Spanish as their first language at home with their parents, they identify more strongly with English, often referring to it as their “first language.” When describing her languaging practices, Marcela explains, “My first language is English and then Spanish and I understand Zapotec.” Antonio also highlights the prominence of English in his life: “I didn’t know how to speak Spanish because all my life I was talking English. Always in English.”

After years in Mexico, these students are relegated to using English in basic language classes at their school and sometimes with siblings or visitors in their town. They note a shift in their languaging practices. Marcela, for examples, states:

When I came back to Mexico my English was better than I speak now. I think it’s because I’ve been here for three years speaking more Spanish than English that makes your English go lower and making your Spanish better.

Yet, even as their Spanish improves, it was often family members that provided them Spanish support as schools have yet to offer programs or structures for students who arrive having never used the language for academic purposes (Despange & Jacobo, 2016). For Antonio, his mother was key to his Spanish development: “I learn how to start writing Spanish when I was in 8th grade. My mom teach me. She doesn’t even speak English, she always speak Spanish. She helped me.”

Even as their English declines, they see the value and potential for economic gain that their knowledge of English can bring to Mexico for the short and long term. Antonio sees the potential to put his English to use with the tourists who come to see the well-known weekly market in his town:

I’m thinking to work like a tour guide because in Saturdays is like a flea market here and lots of American people that speak English don’t know here and I can help them but they pay me.

Edwin has come to understand that English can open doors to careers:

I want to study tourism because my English benefits me. I also want to know places, meet new places, and learn more cultures and all that. Well, I would like to go work there. I would say go study to the US but that’s the decision of my parents if they want to go back and I would have to accept it.

With movement and time, transborder students learn and lose features of their linguistic repertoire. Their named
languages tell their stories of their roots and journeys as they also impact who they are and who they may become.

**Seeking Understanding in Schools**

Although the role and purpose of schools may be similar between the United States and Mexico, there are significant differences to the approaches in the two nations, as well as within them. The two countries have different methods of educating students who are immigrants or those who have been educated in different nations. The United States has a history of educating immigrant students and, thus, has a range of programs and services to meet their unique needs. The Lau v. Nichols ruling (1974) requires schools to provide students identified as requiring additional support in learning English special programs for language learning. Most find themselves in English as a Second or New Language (ESL/ENL) classes (Wright, 2010). A much smaller percentage of students are in bilingual programs that use English and their home language. While the United States has developed policies to support students still deemed to be learning English, the actual implementation and success of these programs is uneven at best (Wright, 2010).

Mexican schools have a much shorter history of receiving immigrants, or Mexican political citizens educated in the United States. No legislation exists to ensure that students receive focused services, and educators have limited knowledge about how to support this student sub-group. However, the Mexican Secretariat of Public Education (known as SEP) has started to pay more attention to this student sub-group and their unique needs. Bilingual education is mostly relegated to those in private and costly Spanish-English schools, while a small number of students are educated bilingually in Spanish and an indigenous language (Sayer & Gopar, 2015). With communication between national educational systems to facilitate transfers and curricular continuity non-existent, students not only find entering schools difficult, but they also often find that their language practices are insufficient for success.

Transborder students experience a formal education that can range from smooth transitions to “fractures” (Zúñiga & Vives-Romero, 2014) as they move between schools and systems across states and countries. New schools bring different curricula, named languages, and expectations for students to navigate with or without support.

In the United States, moves between schools are due to changes in a family’s residence. Students attend schools with high levels of ethnic and racial diversity, as well as those that are highly segregated. Marcela experienced both ends of the continuum as she moved from school to school in California, attending approximately a different school per year:

It wasn’t really hard because it was a lot of Latinos and Mexican people. [In another school] I had two friends that were Korean girls so I didn’t really feel left out because they didn’t really know English so I knew that they were like me because they were a little bit like scared being at school, being different.

Marcela not only felt a bond with other Latinx students, including Mexicans, but also related to those who were learning English as an additional language. Edwin recalls that in “elementary school, in that beginning I was shy but then I met friends, I met Mexican friends, Latinos and I started meeting American friends.” He started with peers he most closely identified with and with whom he shared a named language, but then he branched out.

In U.S. schools, students also had higher levels of support in language learning as compared to their schools in Mexico, with all three students receiving English as a Second Language (ESL) services. No students reported learning Spanish in U.S. schools and/or being placed in bilingual education, although such programs do exist in California and Florida. They also discuss the culture of schools as drastically different. Antonio, for example, said:

I liked that at school I don’t have to wear uniforms. They don’t order me to cut my hair, you can have it as long as you wanted. We had birthday parties in there and I liked all my life when I lived there because it’s so perfect. It’s so beautiful that place.

The freedoms afforded in appearance and dress were appreciated by Antonio. Having been back in Mexico for 4 years, he tends to glorify both schooling and life in the United States as being “perfect.”

Once families returned, they learned that simply entering school in Mexico can be a bureaucratic nightmare, in spite of the fact that they are Mexican citizens. This is compounded with fees and delays that impede students from seamlessly resuming their education. Edwin shares that:

The process is like, you got to go take a test, I had to do 2 or 3 tests in Oaxaca. I had to translate my certifications in Spanish, then from right there, that’s it practically. It took like a year. I was in school and I was studying but the process took like a year to finish. Well once I arrived here I had to pay, I was like “Why do I have to pay?” I’m already used to not paying.

Unlike some students who are not able to enter school while their paperwork was being processed, Edwin was
able to start attending while completing the admission process. Although students are now required to go to school through high school in Mexico, a regulation that was passed in 2013, families must still pay matriculation fees at the high school level, which can be costly and sometimes result in students never attending or dropping out at this last phase of their mandatory formal education.

After entering school, students often find themselves isolated from peers as they make sense of a new school system. Edwin explains:

My first months, I didn’t know a lot of Spanish, I was like what is she saying, I had no friends, I was just like I feel uncomfortable, and then like I had just to accept it.

When students find themselves back in Mexico—and in the country’s school system for the first time—they require support when it comes to a setting that has different academic expectations, linguistic demands, and cultural practices. In the absence of specific programing geared towards these students, they are often left to their own devices. Some, like Edwin, reach out to peers for assistance. He explains, “Sometimes my friends help, the ones that were really my friends.” He also requested that his teachers “just speak slower or give me extra classes.” He explains, “First they just looked at me and say ‘How could you come from the US you look like a normal Mexican that speaks Spanish?’ . . . I told them my experience. [Then] they saw me in a different way.”

Being required to use Spanish for academic purposes for the first time is a challenging position that students struggle to negotiate. Sometimes they act as their own advocates, as in Edwin’s case, and other times they rely on their parents to explain their circumstance. Marcela shares:

Coming back to Oaxaca and starting a new school was difficult because I had to learn and write Spanish. That made me a bit frustrated because the teachers wanted me to write and read in Spanish and I was like nervous because I didn’t really know how to do that. They got a bit mad, but my mom talked to them and they understand that I didn’t know much Spanish so that helped me a lot.

As the students struggle in Spanish, they found the required English classes to be overly simplistic, but they also identified their own English proficiency as a form of social capital that elevated their position among their peers. Marcela explains:

Being here in Oaxaca and having my English class is kind of boring for me because I already know all the things that my teachers show me, but I mean, my classmates they are barely know English so it’s difficult for them so they treat me like good friends because I can help them so they sometime tell me, “what does this mean?” I don’t give them the answers, but I tell them what it means so they can understand and that way they learn more English. I tell them what it means and they go on with the class, I’m like a guide for them so they can understand the more the class.

Like many other transborder students back in Mexico, Marcela plans to use her English in her future career. She aims to become an English teacher, but English can be both a blessing and a curse in school, as Edwin explains:

Well to me I feel proud because it’s like a gift. It’s like a disadvantage because that’s the only thing they want me as a friend. Sometimes they don’t help [in Spanish]. I have another two friends in my class that also speak English. . . Sometimes in the class they start teasing us, they say “Ya deja el inglés (Quit with the English), gringo.” I tell them “at least I have this thing. I’m proud of it.”

English is a commodity, but one that can make students feel that they are also being taken advantage of. It is also a marker of how they are different from their peers, sometimes being teased for being American with terms such as gringo and pocho. Gringo is typically used to describe a White person from the United States. Pocho is used to refer to Mexicans who have left the country and are characterized by speaking English and/or what is perceived as a variety of Spanish spoken by outsiders. Both terms are pejoratives, especially when referring to individuals of Mexican heritage. In spite of these difficulties, Edwin is able to still view his English as a resource.

Being a student between the United States and Mexico offers a range of challenges and opportunities. Students are confronted with learning in distinct languages and they receive different levels of support in this process. The way they are viewed by teachers and peers often requires further explanation and leads to varied levels of acceptance. Yet, they bring with them bilingual and multicultural practices that schools and society either embrace or reject.

**Conclusion and Implications**

Transborder students experience significant shifts in their identities, languaging, and schooling as they cross borders between the United States and Mexico. Their lives are enriched by their experiences across nations. Students are able to learn about the cultural intricacies of living in different communities in the United States and Mexico, have opportunities to expand their languaging and literacy practices, and learn to navigate school systems that are in different languages and expectations.
They do all this while developing first-hand understandings of how government policies—or the absence of them—on the local, national, and binational level impact people’s lives and futures.

On the other hand, transborder students experience substantial challenges and setbacks when they find themselves back in Mexico. They struggle to negotiate their political and cultural citizenship and vacillate between feelings of belonging to both or neither nation. They experience great difficulties with the new language in their schools and communities. They are at a loss when it comes to communicating in indigenous languages, resulting in difficulties interacting with extended family members, and struggle with the new expectations of using Spanish for academic purposes. In school, they both blend in as Mexican-origin students and stand out as students who do not know the norms of the school system. Teachers often view them as struggling students, rather than transborder students who have only experienced schooling in the United States through English. They also lack specialized supports or programs to help them become successful in the new language and context of Mexican schools.

Language policies at the federal and school levels play a role in how their speakers are viewed and the extent to which people have opportunities to become bilingual and biliterate. This is especially true in U.S. schools located in states with anti-bilingual education policies. Bilingual or multilingual education on both sides of the border in English, Spanish, and indigenous languages would better prepare students for schooling in either country, as well as their futures as global citizens. Mexican schools could consider special programs or supports for students new to learning in Spanish, as well as spaces for transborder students to come together to share their experiences and advocate for awareness and understanding (Kleyn, 2015).

With the likelihood of more families returning to Mexico due to the anti-immigrant discourse and actions of the Trump administration, schools will see an increase in their numbers of transborder students. Many of these students will continue to live transbordered lives between both countries, and possibly in others as well. While immigration and education policy changes are strongly needed, waiting for these top-down reforms to support transborder students across nations is not enough. As a society, we must find ways to build on these students’ multilingual and multicultural strengths and in-depth political understandings by opening up spaces for dialogue about migration in the broadest sense possible. Seeing people solely through the lens of labels or statistics is limiting and damaging. It is the voices and stories of these students and their families that must prevail to move us forward. Only when they are a valued part of each nation’s fabric will they be seen for the ways they can contribute transnationally and become positioned to be the leaders who can impact positive changes that build bridges rather than borders.

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