

Generaciones' Narratives

SECTION	Chapter 1
TITLE	<i>Generación</i> 1920-1950: Alternative Literacy Practices, Old and New Forms of Sponsorship, The Emergence of Gender Bias, and Bilingual and Bicultural Hardships
AUTHOR	John Scenters-Zapico
OVERVIEW	<p>This <i>generación</i> allows us to peek into the window of a time when technology was not as advanced as today; from our glimpse we can see how education and attitudes have evolved over sixty-five years. These participants, between fifty-six and eighty-six years old, are the oldest group I could hope to persuade to participate because only 10% of El Paso's population is above sixty-five years old. A unique story in this chapter is that of Victoria Montoya, born in 1922, and her daughter, Marcia McNamee, born in 1946; here they share their experiences as mother and daughter, separated by twenty-four years and united by their social, cultural, and historical experiences. In them we see a first <i>generación</i> college graduate who became a teacher and who uses technology because of her profession and her husband's business. From the chapter's participants, we begin to understand a complex array of literacy sponsorships, the destructive role of gender bias I attaining an advanced education, and bicultural challenges.</p>
COPYRIGHT AND REPRODUCTION	<p>For personal noncommercial use, readers may download/print a copy of the ebooks found on this site, and may link to this page. Readers may not reproduce this ebook or project, or display it on another web site. In no way does the above affect any of the following rights: fair use rights; the author's moral rights; rights other persons may have either in the work itself or in how the work is used.</p> <p>Per U.S. copyright law, readers may, without permission, use limited portions of copyrighted work for the purpose of analysis, review, critique, parody, etc. All such use should be accompanied by appropriate attribution to both the author and the publisher.</p> <p>Requests for permission to use materials from this ebook or</p>

	project in new publications should be directed to Utah State University Press on behalf of Computers and Composition Digital Press. www.usupress.org/contact Utah State University Press 7800 Old Main Hill Logan, UT 84322-7800
PRESS URL	http://ccdigitalpress.org
BOOK URL	http://ccdigitalpress.org/generaciones



Computers and Composition **Digital Press**

AN IMPRINT OF UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS



Generación 1920-1950: Alternative Literacy Practices, Old and New Forms of Sponsorship, The Emergence of Gender Bias, and Bilingual and Bicultural Hardships

John Scenters-Zapico

Manuel.
Que el gobierno tenga marginados a los trabajadores del campo y que para poder sostener la fam. era necesario salir a trabajar a las ciudades, o fuera del país (de braceros).

(One of several handwritten notes that participant Ernesto Payan, Durango, Mexico, attached to his survey with a paperclip.)

When we read, write, teach, and learn with historical consciousness, we save from extinction the often inchoate yearnings of voices in change. (Brandt, "Literacy Learning" 46)

When I started researching *Generaciones*, finding participants in the 1920-1950 *generación* became a significant challenge. This chapter covers more years in a *generación* than the others—thirty to be exact—but it is still within the scope of a *generación* as defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and by the *Real Academia Española*. My original intent was to keep the *generaciones* and thus the chapters equal in years, but I quickly found that *generaciones* are much more than years: They are interconnections among family, culture, education, and societal commonplaces.



This *generación* allows us to peek into the window of a time when technology was not as advanced as today; from our glimpse we can see how education and attitudes have evolved over sixty-five years. I knew these participants, between fifty-six and eighty-six years old, would be the oldest group I could hope to persuade to participate because only 10% of El Paso's population is above sixty-five years old ("Population"). A unique story in this chapter is that of Victoria Montoya, born in 1922, and her daughter, Marcia McNamee, born in 1946; here they share their experiences as mother and daughter, separated by twenty-four years and united by their social, cultural, and historical experiences. In them we see a first *generación* college graduate who became a teacher and who uses technology because of her profession and her husband's business. In this first *generación* I could not overlook the wealth of connections Mrs. Montoya and her daughter shared.

In Mexico, during several participants' youth, important social events were taking place. In 1938, two years before one of the participants in this chapter, Señora Suarez, was born, many of Mexico's companies became nationalized:



Estando en la presidencia el general Lázaro Cárdenas decretò la expropiación de las empresas petroleras y constituyó la Compañía Exportadora del Petróleo Nacional. Los Ferrocarriles Nacionales son entregados al Sindicato del Ferrocarrilero (un año después de la nacionalización). ("El México Contemporáneo")

The same year she was born Leon Trotsky was murdered in Mexico, and in 1942 Mexico declared war on Japan and Germany, showing its unity with the U.S. ("Timeline: Mexico").

In the U.S., three years after Señora Suarez was born, successful movements intended to protect the rights of the large influx of immigrants to the U.S. were taking place. In 1941 the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) protested against Southern Pacific Railroad's discrimination when it refused to provide skilled apprenticeships to Mexican Americans, and in 1942 the *Bracero* Program began, allowing Mexican nationals to temporarily work in the United States, mostly in the agricultural industry (see Chávez, "Smithsonian Staff").

On the literary front, in 1945 Josephina Niggli published Mexican Village, ten stories where she explores her identity as part Mexican and part Anglo. That same year saw Mexican American veterans return from WWII and use their G.I. benefits for college education and for purchasing homes. In 1947 Harry S. Truman became the first president to visit Mexico City, where he laid a wreath for the Niños Heroes of the U.S.-Mexican War. That same year, Gonzalo Mendez's lawsuit against several California



school districts caused the Federal District Court to rule that segregation in schools was unconstitutional. This set a judicial precedent for the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case, repealing the concept of “separate but equal.” In 1948, World War II veterans organized the American G.I. Forum in Texas to struggle against discrimination of Mexican Americans, and the film *Salt of the Earth*, welcomed as an accurate portrayal of Mexican Americans’ struggles, was released. In 1964, maquiladoras sprang up all along the U.S.-Mexico border. These factories, while still controversial, are responsible for continued industrial growth in Mexico and outsourcing of U.S. jobs.¹ Also in 1964, the U.S. saw the *Bracero* Program repealed, thus allowing Mexican American labor leaders to begin unionizing farm workers.

Within the sociohistorical context of all these changes, this chapter focuses on five emergent literacy ideas: 1. Alternative Traditional Literacies: These literacies are traditional in that they involve the acts of reading and writing, yet they are alternative in that they are situated and not associated with mainstream literacy practices. Some of the types of alternative traditional literacies that participants revealed to me were the reading of comics, magazines, and the Bible; one family even made it a practice to take their daughter to Juárez, Mexico, to read street signs; 2. Direct and Indirect Sponsorship: We begin to see how each of these sponsorship roles is significant to the development of electronic literacies and, more often than not, they are not mutually complementary. A direct sponsor is a teacher figure who actually teaches a participant a new electronic literacy, while an indirect sponsor helps make new literacy learning possible through such acts as purchasing a new computer or serving as a computer lab monitor; 3. Gender Bias: We experience how two women participants had their educational lives affected by their fathers’ belief that women do not go on for advanced study because further education is reserved for men; 4. Bilingualism and Biculturalism: Experiences of cultural, familial, and social challenges of learning to be bilingual and

¹ This massive border industry was created in 1964 and dominates the industrial makeup of the 2,000-mile border between the United States and Mexico. “Essentially, it was established by the Border Industrialization Program (B.I.P.) as a replacement for the then-ending Bracero Program.

The advent of the maquiladora industry transformed the border regions into expeditiously developing industrial zones, particularly appealing to American firms that utilized massive labor forces to manufacture goods. Under the provisions of the U.S.-Mexican Twin Plan Agreement, raw materials can be temporarily imported into Mexico duty free under the promise of future exportation.

Products are assembled and/or manufactured utilizing inexpensive Mexican labor and the finished products are exported back to the United States where duty is paid only on the Mexican value added. A ‘twin plant’ may be located anywhere in the United States, with its sister plant built anywhere in Mexico. Most plants in Mexico are located in U.S.-Mexico border towns, to take advantage of the proximity to American markets, suppliers and certain border trade incentives.”

(“Maquiladoras: The Twin Plant Assembly Program”)



bicultural on a border that both accepts and negates these qualities begin to surface with these participants.

Migrations from Mexico to U.S.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Birth</u>	<u>Place of Birth</u>	<u>Migration 1</u>	<u>Current Residence</u>
<i>Elena Suarez</i>	1940	Santa Barbara, Chihuahua, MX	Juárez, MX	El Paso, TX
<i>Ernesto Payan</i>	1944	Durango, Durango, MX	El Paso, TX	El Paso, TX
<i>Ana Rincon</i>	1949	Rancho la Albarrada, MX	El Paso, TX	El Paso, TX

The first three participants were all born in different parts of Mexico but eventually ended up in El Paso, Texas. Because of their ages in this *generación* and the poor economic backgrounds they came from, the stories of Elena Suarez, Ernesto Payan, and Ana Rincon highlight unique stories of struggle and change. In this chapter, I present their stories of traditional literacies as they learned them in Mexico and the challenges and conflicts they faced in learning English, studying, and working in El Paso.

Señora Elena Suarez was born on November 9, 1940, in Santa Barbara, Chihuahua, about 1,130 miles from the border towns of Juárez and El Paso. She was raised, however, in Juárez and El Paso. While growing up, her family had little money, as she was raised in a single-parent household by her mother. Their small one-bedroom home had no electricity; they washed clothes by hand and used kerosene lamps for light. She recalled how, as a child, her grandmother taught her to crochet, an activity she excelled at. Her whole family came together for church on Sundays and she became involved in church groups, where one activity she fondly recalled was “gathering egg shells from neighbors, painting them, and filling them with confetti. Then on Sundays, we would sell the ‘cascarones’ at the weekly *kermes*.”² For many poorer families, socialization and sharing becomes a large part of their lives, and the sharing continues in the distribution of reading materials which plays a vital means to alternative literacy practices for families, cultures, and even countries whose residents cannot afford to run out and buy the latest reading materials.



Growing up on the lower end of the economic ladder in Mexico in the 1940s, Elena did not have access to some of the gateways that other middle-class Mexicans had in education and language learning discussed in later chapters. She learned to read and

² A fair or charity fundraiser, in this case at her church.



write in Spanish in elementary school in Juárez and when she went to elementary school in El Paso she began studying English, but she told me she learned a lot of English from movies, TV, comics and newspapers. The Whitewater literacy data shortsightedly does not consider hand-me-down (and around from friend-to-friend and neighbor-to-neighbor) reading materials like comics or newspapers. However, during interviews, mentions of these types of alternative literacy practices cropped up repeatedly. In reality, such practices act as informal networks for sharing limited resources. While Lankshear and Knobel's paradigmatic model stresses that we need to acknowledge informal literacies like these, their ontological model stresses technology: "Many of these new and changing social practices involve new and changing ways of producing, distributing, exchanging and receiving texts by electronic means" (16). Yet similar ontological practices are evident even in settings less technological than they suggest.

Elena's recollections of some of her family's experiences in the unclearly demarcated zone that is the borderlands began with the story of her great-grandfather who wanted to live in the U.S. and moved his family to Miami, Arizona, in 1917-18.³ He remained there only a few years because "his daughters wanted to return to Mexico to find husbands." He obliged and moved the family back to Mexico to fulfill his daughters' wishes. Nevertheless, Elena noted that "he wanted to return to the U.S. He attempted three times but never made it." Similar to many of the participants' responses throughout *Generaciones*, her great-grandfather desired the economic opportunities the U.S. had to offer but the cost of separating from his family was too high a price to pay. Here was a man who was committed to his three daughters, all of whom wanted to marry traditionally in Mexico and remain there. The implication for the three daughters was that they wanted to forgo the "promises" of better economic mobility in exchange for retaining their culture, language, and heritage. Commuting back and forth between Mexico and the U.S. is common for Latino/as if they live nearby. If not, many end up living out their lives outside of "their" culture and often longing for it. In Elena Suarez's family, her great-grandfather acquiesced to his daughters' wishes: he moved back across the *Río Bravo* to Mexico in order to maintain his family's togetherness. For him, family outweighed any possibility of a better economic future.

Elena's mother "learned to read and write in Spanish, when she was in school in Mexico." However, interestingly and as a reflection of the unseen dynamics on the border, her mother "knew how to read and write some English *from reading cookbooks*."

³ In 1916, General John J. Pershing led 10,000 American soldiers into Mexican territory in retaliation for a raid on Columbus, New Mexico by General Francisco "Pancho" Villa. After eleven months, Pershing was forced to return to the U.S. without ever catching sight of Villa. U.S.-Mexican relations suffer because of the action ("Interactive Timeline").



She worked in restaurants and in the kitchens for schools, churches, and a nursing home” (emphasis added). This is another situated alternative literacy practice that would typically be unmeasured, yet it is not immeasurable. Where would her mother have fallen in a national measure of literacy in the U.S.? She would have been able to “function” in two languages and cultures, but not in any culturally based statistical way.

Where would her cookbooks as reading materials and her applied ability to read and make new dishes stand? In the U.S. she would be labeled illiterate in English, just another statistic. In contrast, if a U.S.-born citizen whose first language was English learned as much Spanish as Elena’s mother knew English, he/she would be considered competent enough for many high-paying jobs requiring Spanish.

Elena’s own educational memories began in elementary school in Juárez, where she recalled that classes were separated by gender. Like most students in Mexico and the U.S., she studied math, social studies, and geography, but her favorite pastime was reading about Native Americans. Two noteworthy events she recalled from her elementary days stand in stark contrast to each other, yet they are repeated throughout *Generaciones* by other participants. The first is her reflection on the effects of a major world war: in this case the end of WWII and the omniscient fear it evoked in many facets of her life. The second is her reflection on language: She recalled that her mother wanted her to be fluent in English. While I can only surmise here, I see a thread of traditional literacy activity which began with her grandparents and continued with her mother, who learned work-specific English skills to gain employment and to practice her hobby, cooking. In these practices Elena observed and experienced the economic benefits of being a fluent English speaker as well as the stigma of not being bilingual on a bilingual border.

An important yet unrecognized form of indirect electronic literacy sponsorship emerged during my discussions with Elena, who was not exposed to technology until the early 1990s. At fifty she volunteered to work in the computer lab of a nearby elementary school: “I supervised the children as they worked on educational programs on Apple computers.” Many parents and grandparents similarly become significant indirect sponsors by purchasing a computer for someone in their family, or, like Elena, creating literacy opportunities for others in gateways outside of their homes. Importantly, however, indirect sponsors do not teach and often do not even use technology. With traditional reading and writing literacies, parents and grandparents more often than not were involved in some fashion in teaching, yet with technology this often is not possible. With the advent of affordable technology placed in numerous schools, countless teachers served as indirect sponsors as well. Students in these schools had access to computers, but the teachers, for the most part, were unable to offer any significant training or support.



In the computer lab where Elena worked we see several dynamics unfolding. First, while we do not know the level of electronic literacies that the supervising teacher had, we do know that Elena had no exposure whatsoever. The impact Elena had on the students as a direct electronic literacy sponsor in the lab had to be zero: she was not directly involved in teaching students how to use the technologies. Her indirect sponsorship effect on the students, however, is a possible gray zone of a gateway and sponsor symbiotic relationship. She served, I am certain, a key role in providing *physical* access for many of the students by allowing them time in the computer lab. Without her volunteering, the lab-as-gateway might not have been open to those students at that time.

At about the same time that she worked in the computer lab, another transitional dynamic emerged. Elena's "husband brought home his office computer when he got a newer one for his business. He brought it home so that he could do his company invoices at home." With the computer now in their home, it became a gateway, not for Elena, but for her daughter, who "was in college so she used it for schoolwork." While her home became a private gateway through her husband's indirect sponsorship (he brought and installed the computer at home and made it available to anyone in the family), Elena felt neither the personal need nor interest to use the computer for anything in her life. She viewed the technology as a continuation of her husband's work, and useful for her daughter's schoolwork. Like most in Suarez's *generación*, computers represented work, and they had nothing to do with leisure or hobby activities as many of us think of them today. Thus, while technology was available for her at home and she had two potential direct sponsors, she, like the next participant, did not deem this technology as necessary in her life.

Born in 1944 in Durango, Mexico, *Señor Ernesto Payan* also grew up here. He now lives in El Paso, Texas, as his family viewed coming to the U.S. as a solution to the poverty they experienced in Durango. Of all the interviewees, he and Ana Rincon (discussed next) considered themselves *mestizos*.⁴ *Señor Payan* indicated he grew up "in a little town. Simple. Made of adobe." From other participants I came to discover that such adobe homes were made by some member of the immediate family and usually lacked electricity, heating and water, making computer ownership impossible. His activities while growing up consisted of going to school in the morning and helping in the fields to cultivate corn and other crops in the afternoon. Because he was so busy with school and farm work, he had little leisure time.

⁴ Participants are asked some questions about their religion, race, and color. They fill this in with their own selection and choice of description. *Mestizo* is a mixture of Mexican or Spaniard with Mexican Indian.



Ernesto learned to read and write in Spanish at eight in school, where he studied Spanish, science, history and math, liking math the best. The way he learned to read and write was “with silable⁵ method and relating letters with things”; that is, when a teacher would show a letter, the students had to come up with a word that started with that letter. He also went on to describe his secondary school in Juárez, recalling “era grande, de ladrillo, color rojo” and studied “español, matematicas, ciencias naturales y sociales.” His parents stressed that it was a “good thing to go to school.” Alternative literacy played a key role for him, as he often saw his parents reading the newspaper, magazines, and the Bible, and just as importantly, they in turn would read these materials to him.

Events that influenced him center on national occurrences that affected this border region. As a teenager he wanted to be like Adolfo López Mateos,⁶ whom he calls “a charismatic president,” charismatic because he was able to move the Mexican people and create trust in an otherwise corrupt system, and President López Mateos “negociaba el territorio de ‘El Chamizal’” with President Lyndon B. Johnson. The Chamizal Treaty, which was settled in 1964, is a result of the Rio Grande/*Río Bravo*’s shifting banks over the course of about one hundred years, changing the international boundary between the U.S. and Mexico, specifically between El Paso and Juárez. A deal was finally reached between the U.S. and Mexico in which two parks were built on both sides of the river.⁷ The other unforgettable event for him was “la Guerra de Vietnam.”

In 2000, at age fifty-six, he took a fifteen-day course at the *Univérsidad de Juárez* and was able to use a computer for the first time in his life. However, like Señora Suarez, he did not see how a computer would fit into his life, seeing it as a tool for work only, not something he could readily integrate into his life. When his class ended, he stopped using computers. In my video interview with him, he explained that since he was

⁵ “Silable” is syllable.

⁶ Author’s note: Mexican president.

⁷ “The Chamizal dispute between Mexico and the United States was a boundary conflict over about 600 acres at El Paso, Texas, between the bed of the Rio Grande as surveyed in 1852 and the present channel of the river. About 100 acres of the tract fell within the business district of the city. The dispute was based on the interpretation of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 and the Treaty of 1884. These agreements specified that the boundary should be down the middle of the river along the deepest channel, regardless of any alterations in the banks or channels. The Treaty of 1884 also provided that the alterations had to result from such gradual natural causes as the erosion of alluvium and not from the cutting off of land by floods or sudden changes in the river’s course. This provision followed the long-established doctrine of international law that when changes in the course of a boundary river are caused by a deposit of alluvium, the boundary changes with the river, but when changes are due to avulsion, the old channel remains the boundary” (“Chamizal Dispute”).



supervising employees who used computers he felt he should at least know something about them.

Señora Ana Rincon was born five years after Ernesto Payan in 1949 in Rancho la Albarrada, Mexico. Like Señor Payan she too said she is *mestiza*. Growing up, her family had little money and, like many others, lived in a small adobe house with one room and a kitchen. Despite the cramped housing, Ana recalled many wonderful outdoor childhood memories, such as swimming in a river, climbing trees, playing *La Lotería* (a game similar to Bingo using pictures instead of numbers), and reading stories.

When she reflected on her first school (three classrooms surrounded by corn fields), she realized it was “segregated by economics,” for poor children, but not separated by race. Her characterization is as an adult looking back, yet as an adult she recognizes that there are many levels of educational systems. The economic divide in Mexico, as in the U.S., has affected our educational systems for far too long. Her words, “segregated by economics,” could be applied to most educational inequalities plaguing these two nations.

The other aspect of school that she recalled was one familiar to many students on both sides of the border at this time, what I call *stick pedagogy*. If students did not listen in class while reading, she told me, “They hit us with a stick.” Today this may sound like tough punishment, but several participants from *Generaciones* also mentioned stick pedagogy. Today this is largely illegal, yet the practice continues in varying ways in educational systems on both sides of the border.

At eight years old, though she was not in school at the time, Ana vividly recalled wanting to learn to read stories, yet her family sent mixed messages about education. Her parents often told her that being able to read and write “was a form of intelligence.” However, they also told her “school was worthless. We shouldn’t go to school.” This is reflected by the fact that neither her grandparents nor her mother knew how to read or write. Only her father, she said, knew how to read and write a little. As such, her parents never read in the house or to her. Because her parents practiced little traditional literacy, they did not support Ana’s literacy learning, as she did not have access to books at home or elsewhere. Alternatively, she eventually learned to read with comics.

Ana’s first exposure to computers was through pictures of mammoth supercomputers in magazines she read in secondary school; however, she never saw a real computer at that time. It was years later that, as a mother herself, she gained access to a computer. Today, her adult daughter has two computers, one for her business and one at home,



which Ana has access to and occasionally uses for personal use and for school. In this sense Ana's daughter serves as an indirect sponsor. Her daughter's home is an important refined and localized notion of a gateway: It is a micro-literacy zone where Ana can travel relatively unimpeded and use the computer for whatever she wishes.

Ana has had to move physically and psychologically since her upbringing in Rancho la Albarrada, Mexico, where her father often told the family, "que no habia que salir de nuestra tierra porque en la ciudad habia gente mala. Decia, 'Aqui la perdi y aqui la tengo que encontrar.'" In turn he discouraged migration to the U.S. because it was a dangerous place, where many men died trying to make a better life for themselves.

Migrations from the U.S. to Mexico

Name	Birth	Place of Birth	Migration 1	Migration 2	Current Residence
<i>Gilberto Fontan</i>	1938	Silver City, NM	Juárez, MX	Phoenix, AZ	Phoenix, AZ
<i>Alberto Gonzalez</i>	1944	El Paso, TX	Juárez, MX	White Sands, NM	White Sands, NM

These two participants were born in the U.S., one in El Paso, Texas, and the other about two hours away in Silver City, New Mexico. Their initial commonality is that they spent most of their young lives in Juárez, Mexico. Señor Alberto Gonzalez, who comes from what he sees as a privileged family, owns his own computer business, while Señor Gilberto Fontan has never used a computer. Their life experiences serve as a contrast in both wealth and how personal choices according to world events can affect one's life.

*Señor Alberto Gonzalez*⁸ was born in 1944 in El Paso, yet he grew up in Juárez, where his "family owned stores and property in Juárez, [and] we lived in a family compound." The home he described in Juárez "was on Lerdo Street in the family compound. There were three houses (ours, my grandmother's and my aunt's) and one of our stores on the corner." In the compound he enjoyed such amenities as a tennis court, a basketball court, gardens, a playground, and a billiard and table tennis room.

His affluent family made sure that he and his siblings had a solid bilingual and bicultural education. As a child Alberto studied in El Paso, but his parents hired tutors to make sure he and his siblings could read and write in Spanish. He indicated that he and his brother did all their schooling in El Paso, including college at the University of Texas at

⁸ Author's note: I twice interviewed in person Señor Alberto Gonzalez after reading about his moving back to El Paso in an article in the [El Paso Times](#).



El Paso, while his sisters attended school in Juárez until they started high school in El Paso, and then graduated from UTEP. He said that “[I]n my family we were expected to get an education; out of eight children, seven of us got a college degree with three of us having master’s [degrees].” In addition to the children’s college degrees, Alberto’s parents also understood the importance and value of bringing their children up bilingual and bilcultural.

His parents’ literacy practices were a mixture of mainstream and alternative activities. His father, who moved as a teenager from Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua, Mexico, to Juárez, started the family’s businesses exporting to the U.S. His father needed to be fluent in English and Spanish to succeed in the business. Alberto often observed his parents reading newspapers like the El Paso Herald Post (English) and El Fronterizo (Spanish), magazines such as Time and Life, and the Bible. He also observed them regularly composing letters and shopping lists related to the family business.

Alberto first came into contact with computers and electronic literacy in 1966 when he was drafted to the Vietnam War. The U.S. Army served as a direct sponsor for him in many ways. His training was both by accident and by plan. Because the training to learn computer code and use computers would take time, it would keep him away from the battlefield, and, once trained, it would keep him off the front lines. At that time, technology was not a passion: he viewed it as a lifesaver. After the military Alberto worked as a military computer consultant at White Sands, New Mexico, and he recently retired from this position. He moved to El Paso in 2006 and opened his own computer store, Data Doctors.

He has access to technology at home and, obviously, in the workplace. For his business and personal use he occasionally creates new media designs, graphic art designs, and PowerPoint slides, but his business is primarily in computer diagnosis, repairs, and sales. In my two interviews with him at his store, he showed me his extensive digitized picture collection of his family in various slide shows and PowerPoint creations.

Señor Gilberto Fontan was born in Silver City, New Mexico, in 1938; he grew up in Juárez and now lives in Phoenix, Arizona. Gilberto described his family as having little money when he was growing up and his home as “small, old [...] it was in the city.” Gilberto only attended school up until the elementary level in Juárez, where he studied math, history, spelling, reading, and grammar. He learned and studied Spanish in school in Juárez, and informally learned spoken English from his father and friends from El Paso.



Growing up, Señor Fontan recalled that his family loved Mexico and that “there didn’t seem to be any problems at that time. . . . [They] were very good years for Mexico due to the best presidents Mexico has ever had.” His family could not afford to send him to school in the U.S. Even today, he felt that, because of his age and for economic reasons, he has no experience with electronic literacies. At present he does not have access to computers and has never used one. Interestingly, while Gilberto indicated he does not see computers playing a role in his future, he felt that they are important for his brothers, sisters, and his friends.

The contrast between Alberto’s and Gilberto’s access to and use of technology is akin to one individual standing on one side of the Rio Grande divide and another on the other. One crosses with ease and accesses everything available on each side; the other finds it difficult to impossible to even get across. While we might assume Alberto would have more exposure because of his education and affluent upbringing, and he most likely would have, it was only through historical circumstances that immersed him in learning to work with and use technology during the Vietnam War. And it was from what he perceived as a life-and-death opportunity that technology and electronic literacies became his job and his passion. Besides fixing and saving clients’ information from damaged computers, he showed me his incredible catalogue of digital images, many from old pictures he had scanned taken while was growing up between El Paso and Juárez. Gilberto, on the other hand, was only able to complete school in Mexico until the second grade. He has worked hard his entire life, and he does not view electronic literacies as becoming an important part of it any time soon.

Similar to Gilberto and Alberto, the following section examining El Paso born-and-raised participants illuminates how education created significant differences in the ways Victoria Montoya, Marcia McNamee, and Alicia Rodriguez perceived and learned electronic literacies.

El Paso Born and Raised

Name	Birth	Place of Birth	Migration 1	Current Residence
Victoria Montoya	1922	El Paso, TX		El Paso, TX
Alicia Rodriguez	1949	Tornillo, TX	El Paso, TX	El Paso, TX
Marcia McNamee	1946	El Paso, TX		El Paso, TX

Victoria Montoya and Alicia Rodriguez are the children of Mexican immigrants and by implication another nuance of *Generaciones: americanas de primera generación*. In turn, Marcia McNamee, Mrs. Montoya’s oldest daughter, is second *generación*. When several of the participants were in their late twenties, the U.S. was mired in several



conflicts. The Vietnam War had escalated, and the U.S. had severed relations with Cuba in 1961; that same year, the Bay of Pigs fiasco had embarrassed the U.S.,⁹ and the U.S. and Russia faced one of the most intense military standoffs in history as it involved the placement of nuclear weapons in Cuba aimed at the U.S. Racial tensions due to inequality were growing, and in 1961 the Freedom Riders traveled through the South protesting segregation. Martin Luther King gave his now-famous "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963 in Washington, D.C.

Señora Victoria Montoya, the oldest participant of literacy in *Generaciones*, was born in 1922 in El Paso and grew up in El Paso. Her daughter, Marcia McNamee, was born twenty-four years later (1946) in El Paso; she grew up and currently lives here as well. We share in a special historical moment in this section by sharing in the dialogue between two first *generación* participants, one highlighting a first- and second-*generación* mother-daughter intergenerational experience.

Señora Montoya was raised in an economically comfortable home in "the lower valley"¹⁰ of El Paso and it was made out of adobe blocks, made by my Uncle Jerry." Being bilingual was important to her family when she was growing up, and she explained firsthand the push and pull, the need to speak Spanish and English, if for nothing else than to be a part of her entire family. Victoria had to learn Spanish because her "grandfather wouldn't speak to me in my first language, English."¹¹ Her mother learned English from her cousins who lived in San Angelo, Texas, while her father learned at St. Edward's Academy in San Antonio, Texas.

Because of the physical distances from other family members she often saw her parents practicing traditional literacy skills by writing and reading letters to and from relatives. This is another traditional literacy, though not used in any national measure, which has quickly slipped off the radar of common practice. It has been replaced by email, cell phones, and, most recently, text messaging. Another grand irony of literacy studies like Whitewater's is that El Paso was recently (November 2008) ranked number one in text messaging; a lot of people are reading and writing and yet they are off many literacy radars! (Daniels) Her grandparents would read the *Juárez* newspaper on a

⁹ "Bay of Pigs Invasion, 1961, an unsuccessful invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles, supported by the U.S. government. On Apr. 17, 1961, an armed force of about 1,500 Cuban exiles landed in the Bahía de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs) on the south coast of Cuba. Trained since May 1960 in Guatemala by members of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) with the approval of the Eisenhower administration, and supplied with arms by the U.S. government, the rebels intended to foment an insurrection in Cuba and overthrow the Communist regime of Fidel Castro. The Cuban army easily defeated the rebels and by Apr. 20, most were either killed or captured" ("Bay of Pigs Invasion").

¹⁰ Locally this is considered the poor part of the valley, while the Upper Valley is considered the wealthy area, with gated communities.

¹¹ This influence is important. Her two daughters, Marcia and Mary, speak little Spanish.



daily basis, while one of her uncles, intent on learning English, asked that Victoria only speak English with him, so he could pick up as much as possible. An important reflecting point to stop and consider here is the push and pull Victoria experienced. Her grandfather would only speak and write Spanish, while one of her uncles, though a Spanish speaker, insisted on English. The result is a practical bilingualism born from the border.

Reading was common around Victoria's home and reading materials were always lying about. In addition to seeing her mother reading romance novels, she observed newspapers such as the El Paso Times, and the El Paso Herald¹² and magazines such as Newsweek and Time in the household. Through these reading sources, during and after her high school years, she read and lived through the U.S. involvement in World War II from 1939 to 1945.

When it came to schooling, Señora Montoya had many fond memories, yet many world events were unfolding while she attended school. While she attended Burleson Grammar School in El Paso, Herbert Hoover was inaugurated as the 31st president in 1929. At the same time the New York Stock Exchange crashed, setting the stage for the Great Depression. By the time she was nine years old and in fourth grade in 1931, "The Star-Spangled Banner" was adopted as the United States' national anthem.¹³ The students who attended Burleson were "mostly Mexicans." Since she sees herself as American, she felt most of the children attending the school were first *generación*.

Once again "stick pedagogy" appears and she mentioned that while the class practiced reading, "teachers used rulers to keep us in line and reading." One teacher in particular "pulled my hair because of talking" during reading time. Nonetheless, she excelled as a student and her teachers recognized her talent by entering her in a reading competition in the sixth grade.

Victoria kept a diary at this time with the names of the boys she liked. Diaries are another example of alternative literacy practices, but because of their use outside of mainstream education, they are often viewed as a valuable space for developing multiple literacies. Even though journals are commonly used in schools, they are another example of literacies that are not typically measured. Interestingly, journals and especially diaries provoke a dialogic: they are a specific writer's responses to the experiences in her life; often, someone without the writer's permission wants to read them, or, in the case of school journals, peers are supposed to read them. In Victoria's case, "my sister wanted to read what I wrote."

¹² Now defunct.

¹³ Seventy-five years later in 2006, a Spanish version created some controversy (Montgomery).



Victoria, like others in this *generación*, also experienced gender discrimination by her father. Despite the fact that her parents stressed “that it was important to receive higher grades,” and she worked hard to earn good grades, her “father didn’t allow me to go to college because I was a girl. Ended up going to the International Business College.”¹⁴

The women on the border—and I suspect in others parts of the country at this time—were more often than not limited to what they could hope to aspire to in life. The women’s place was in the home, and if the family had the finances for an advanced education, men were chosen.

While growing up Victoria said she had “never come into contact with one [computer]. My family does what is needed. [...] I’ve never used computers. Electric typewriters are what I used to use. There weren’t any that I knew of when I was growing up. Just electric typewriters.” Her experience makes sense when placed into the time frame she worked, before the advent of computers as we know them. She does, however, know about computers and the role they play for other *generaciones*.

Her son-in-law became an indirect sponsor for her granddaughter, and in a positive spiral her granddaughter became an indirect sponsor for her. “My son-in-law,” she told me, “bought a new one a year ago for my granddaughter’s school work.” By creating a private gateway in their home for his daughter and serving as an indirect sponsor, her son-in-law inadvertently created another space for Victoria to practice electronic literacies.

An indirect sponsorship she described took place when she discovered she had anemia. To help her understand the disease better, her granddaughter did research about anemia. While her granddaughter searched for information on the affliction, Victoria sat with her, watched her conduct searches, read information online, and had her print out relevant information. This is the first instance in this study where a younger family member used technology to assist an older family member with a search for information, effectively serving as an indirect sponsor. From this experience Victoria saw that younger students benefit most from technology; at the same time, she felt “illiterates are disadvantaged.” Her view highlights her understanding that literacy of any type is based on economic factors, not on merely creating a false dichotomy of haves and have-nots. Her experience with her granddaughter made her doubly aware that having and knowing how to use evolving electronic literacies creates an even greater disadvantage for those on the lower end of the economic scale.

¹⁴ A post-high school technical school in El Paso.



Señora Alicia Rodriguez was born in 1949 about forty miles outside El Paso in Tornillo, Texas, but grew up in El Paso's *Segundo Barrio*. Her family is typical of *Segundo Barrio* in that her parents are first *generación* Mexican immigrants. Like many on the border, this family worked hard to the best of their abilities to assimilate both bilingually and biculturally. In Mexico, *Señora Rodriguez's* parents went to school: her mother until first grade and her father, third. In order to become U.S. citizens her parents studied just enough English to pass the required citizenry tests; her mother "understands English, but cannot speak or write it." Her father, however, "can read, write, and speak correctly." This may be due to the gender factor at the time. Men had to get out and make a living for the family, while women stayed home. These early influences, though minor, appear to have impacted how Alicia would approach her own learning and views toward bilingualism.

Another alternative literacy practice surfaced with Alicia's family. While Alicia's parents' first language was Spanish, Alicia learned to read and write in English in first grade. However, at eight her parents wanted to make sure she learned some Spanish and about the Mexican culture. To achieve this they regularly took her to Juárez to visit. While there, they ensured she read any sign they could see, such as street and store signs in Spanish (also see participant Erika Mercado, Chapter 4, for a similar pedagogical experience). We see this transitional bilingual and bicultural family wanting to guarantee that their daughter did not lose her language or culture. These trips therefore became language-specific and culturally rich. By school standards and literacy rankings this is an awkward pedagogy, but by situated, practical standards it is a localized and effective one.

Despite her parents' different stresses on bilingualism and biculturalism, the prevalent gender issue of this time surfaces. Again, the male figure is responsible for exercising this practice. Her father's gendered view of advanced education hampered Alicia. An especially bad memory for her was when he wanted her to drop out of high school and go to work, but she refused. After her regular school day, her father would not allow her to participate in activities outside of the home; instead, she had to help her mother with chores and go out to the fields to pick cotton.

Beginning in elementary school and up until high school, Alicia kept a diary to keep track of her joys, frustrations, and life experiences. Her diary served as her longstanding alternative literacy practice, one that helped her to work through many issues growing up. Today, as a mother, Alicia's own daughter served as an indirect sponsor, specifically an economic motivator who urged her mother to find a better job. A technology economic motivator is an individual who encourages a friend or family member to become electronically literate for primarily economic reasons. In this regard there is little to no consideration of the intellectual and communicative possibilities of an



electronic literacy. She pushed her to attend a business college, where Alicia would have her first contact with computers. The motive was purely economic: "I was encouraged by my daughter to get a better job."

Now, looking to the future, Señora Rodriguez realizes that electronic literacies "will play a great role in my grandchildren's future," and "I think computers are the key to a better world." The importance of her awareness and practice of new electronic literacies is immeasurable. As we navigate into each new chapter and *generación*, we discover that Alicia Rodriguez and all of us on the border understand the economic realities of being literate, traditionally and electronically. Just as importantly, how we come to practice these literacies is essential to understanding the roles that others play in our growth and advancement.

The last participant of literacy in this chapter is *Señora Marcia McNamee*, Victoria Montoya's daughter (discussed earlier), born in 1946 and raised in El Paso, who still resides here. Unlike her mother, who experienced the frustration of gender bias that kept her from college, Señora McNamee was fortunate: Her mother insisted that her daughters go to college. As she noted, "Education was stressed throughout my life, through my parents and grandparents. When I graduated from high school there was never any doubt that college was in my future." Holding a BS in education and a MS in reading, Señora McNamee was a dedicated teacher for thirty years, now retired, and she also worked for Holt, Rinhart, and Winston as an editor for its Math Series Model texts.

Marcia told me her family was financially comfortable as she was growing up: "We lived in what I thought was a nice home, went to private, Catholic school. My mother stayed home most of my early years." She described her home while growing up as "a one-story adobe structure, owned by my grandfather. It had a portico on two sides which provided an excellent play area, plus a grassed yard with raised planters which were always filled with flowers." Marcia has many fond memories from her childhood. One telling story reveals that, early on, she desired to be a teacher:

One Christmas I asked for a playhouse and I remember drawing the dimensions on the ground so my mom could see what I wanted. She just smiled. I did receive the playhouse but not quite to the grandeur that I had drawn. I played countless hours in the playhouse which also doubled as a schoolhouse anytime I could persuade a playmate, usually my younger cousin, to be the student (as I was ALWAYS the teacher) . . . In my pretend schoolhouse I would make up worksheets so my students could practice.



Like many in the border area of her *generación*, whose families work hard to assimilate into the American culture, she was guided away from becoming bilingual in Spanish. However, once again it is often the grandparents who serve a role as bilingual and bicultural facilitators. This complexity is reflected in her story, where we see the assimilation and prejudice her mother experienced in the U.S. and her grandparents' desire for her to learn Spanish to understand the family's culture:

My first and foremost language is English. My mother thought she spoke English with an accent and didn't want us to have this problem. Consequently, my Spanish skills at an early age were very poor. When we went to my grandparents' home, my grandfather would encourage Spanish and he would have us recite a poem in Spanish. (Activate video to right for Marcia's expanded commentary).



The struggle to fit in to American culture is now an evident theme in *Generaciones*. In most instances, parents occlude Spanish and, consequently, Mexican culture from their children. Fortunately, for some children another family member, usually a grandparent, notices and attempts to teach them in any way possible.

Marcia was encouraged to write in school and enjoyed creative writing in her life as well:

I kept a diary for about a year. In high school my beau at the time was in the Naval Academy so I would write constantly. One time I sent him a letter entirely written with cut out letters from magazines glued on a roll of toilet paper.

Marcia shared a story that is a part of her family's history. It is a story made up of letters her grandfather wrote during WWI to his to-be wife. Two letters came to mind:

1. A letter that Marcia's grandfather wrote to her grandmother when he was overseas, professing his love for her and his country.
2. A letter from Marcia's grandfather to each of his grandchildren asking them to love one another and to keep in contact with family.



Marcia considered both of these letters important to her personally. The letters are truly inspirational documents for the McNamee family. Importantly they stress that the family remain together, and as I had the privilege to meet with even their extended families I can attest that the letters have had a significant impact as oral and written documents that keep them together despite life's challenges. Letter writing, which came up earlier in the chapter, appears to serve as an important link among family. As mentioned earlier, I see much of this traditional literacy practice as becoming lost to communication by phone, email, blogs, or live webcasts to their loved ones. In the McNamee family the letters have become part of their family's history, one that inspires them to remain close to family. (Activate video to right for Marcia's comments on the letters; a copy of one letter is embedded). With newer electronic media, I wonder how many families are keeping electronic archives of their developing family histories and stories. Unlike hard copies, some digital technologies often become inaccessible because of changes in operating systems, software, and archival storage; for example, changes from floppy disks to micro disks, from Zip disks to CDs and flash drives illustrate how technologies have shifted in past years.



As we might expect from many participants

of this *generación*, computers were not a part of their early lives as they went through the school system. Marcia is no exception. As an adult, however, she learned about computers in her first gateway as a fourth grade teacher in the 1980s, learning to use



and teach with computers at inservice teaching seminars sponsored by the El Paso Independent School District. The school district served as an important work-related direct sponsor and gateway for her so she could effectively learn and in turn teach her students important electronic literacies. (Activate video for Marcia's expanded comments on teaching). Moreover, this is the first example of an individual, specifically a teacher, who took what she had been directly sponsored with and used this to directly sponsor her own students. The impact on

her students over the years had to be powerful. Unlike many teachers at the time,



Marcia was lucky; she was exposed to and trained to teach with computers at school. For teaching, she applied what she learned and used computers to help students create original stories, to design personal stationery, and to prepare oral presentation slides using PowerPoint.

Her use of technology at school transferred to her use of technology at home for work and hobbies. Unlike most of the earlier participants in this chapter who saw computer use at home as mere work, Marcia's view represents an evolution. The actual ways Marcia has come to use and practice electronic literacies is varied, extensive, and represents an insightful transition to the following chapters of younger participants.

(Activate video for Marcia's use of technology today). Marcia daily reads and writes emails and letters, using email to "communicate with family members, friends, order books, [and] help [my] husband with work." Here we discover a synthesis of uses: personal and social motivations for mail; personal and professional motivations for ordering books online; and purely work motivations to help her husband. As we saw earlier, Marcia's daughter helped her



grandmother research anemia on the Web and Marcia also uses it for "doing research on the web." With Señora McNamee we discover the vital role that educational opportunities, sponsors, and gateways play if women are to develop professionally and personally.


Conclusion

This chapter began the important process of paying attention to the alternative literacy practices that these participants performed in order to ensure that their offspring understand the language and culture. Some of these alternative practices ranged from trips across the border to read street signs, thus enculturating and fortifying bilingualism, to ensuring that comics, magazines, and other "passed around" reading materials were always available. While such materials will not show up on literacy measures such as the Whitewater project, they are significant in two ways. First is the mere fact that reading materials were available in the household. Second, participants observed other family members engaged in reading and this served as a model for them.



Also brought to light were several of the refined and new concepts discussed in the Introduction. The initial complexity for understanding direct and indirect sponsorship came up in a variety of ways. At this period of technological development we see little reference to technology learning. We find, however, that direct sponsorship for the traditional literacy skills of reading and writing were taught by various family members, primarily parents and grandparents. When technology is mentioned, these same direct traditional literacy sponsors become, at best, indirect electronic literacy sponsors.

Gender discrimination was a destructive factor during this time period. In the examples that came to light, some of the women were discriminated against based on gender by their fathers, who believed that a woman's place is in the home or performing jobs not requiring much education. The result is that some of the female participants in the chapter could not fulfill their dreams to continue their education. They had to settle for less than their dreams and capabilities. There is a direct link between gender bias like this and education, and without the encouragement and financial support to continue with an education, the women ended up frustrated in their jobs and family roles. On a positive note, Victoria Montoya was able to ensure that her daughters all received advanced educations, ending the gender discrimination she had experienced.

This chapter began the important process of understanding multiple literacy acquisition practices of Latino/a participants on this U.S.-Mexico border. First and foremost in this *generación* are their culturally conflicting experiences in learning to be bilingual and bicultural in Spanish and English. The participants' bilingual and bicultural stories will be useful for educators on this border, other U.S.-Mexico borders, and for other educators who work with students who face similar acculturation challenges. As educators we must remember that the participants in this chapter were children when they learned to be—or not—bilingual and bicultural, and that it was their parents' choices that prompted one route or another. However, many external, societal, and educational drawbacks encouraged parents to respond one way or another. Teachers need to keep in mind that the children they teach come from rich, diverse backgrounds. One of the most effective ways for them to keep a connection with their living family stories and culture is through that family's first language. As we saw in this chapter and will see in upcoming ones, some participants never learned the language of their family and culture, and these individuals typically struggle later in life, feeling they missed out on knowing where their family came from, and remain silent in their inability to begin a cultural dialogue, *¿Quién eran mis abuelos? ¿Dónde vivieron y en qué trabajaron?*  One of the worst dilemmas I have seen some students and colleagues experience is when someone asks them something in Spanish, and despite their Spanish first name and surname, they do not understand and cannot reply.



Last, we saw how economic motivators, such as when Alicia Rodriguez attended the International Business College, served to guide family members who had been displaced from their jobs to study and learn electronic literacies. The implication is that even this *generación* needed friendly public technology gateways and opportunities for learning, refining, and developing electronic literacies in order to advance in the workplace and make a better living.