

Generaciones' Narratives

SECTION	Chapter 4
TITLE	<i>Generación 1971-1980: Micro-Tear Zone Psychology, Home Micro-Literacy Zones, Transport Sponsors, and School Gateways</i>
AUTHOR	John Scenters-Zapico <i>and</i> Lucía Durá
OVERVIEW	<p>While public electronic gateways became more and more prevalent, school children slowly became more aware of their existence, although not necessarily knowing fully how computers fit into their lives.</p> <p>Important events participants shared from this period help us understand more about the culture and society in which they grew up. Within the cultural ecologies of participants from this <i>generación</i> are clear pictures about the introduction of certain technologies. This group also had a good idea of the kinds of people they had the potential to become through recounts of their role models. Gender bias begins to take a backseat as more women occupy roles traditionally associated with men. This creates hope and ambition for some of the females in the chapter.</p>
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Generación 1971-1980: Micro-Tear Zone Psychology, Home Micro-Literacy Zones, Transport Sponsors, and School Gateways

John Scenters-Zapico and Lucía Durá

A computer is like a car. If used properly it can take you a long way. It is all up to the person using it. (Corina Jiménez; activate video for Corina's expanded commentary on this simile)

It is so much easier to find motivation within when there are sponsors and gateways. (Lucía Durá)

While participant Corina Jiménez is specifically comparing cars and computers, the implication is also that participants need transportation—transport sponsors—to get to electronic gateways in order to access and learn electronic literacies. Co-author and participant of this chapter, Lucía Durá, drives home the important social-psychological role of parent and teacher sponsors and places where individuals like Durá have been able to learn and practice electronic literacies. As children, this *generación* would awaken to public service announcements between Saturday morning cartoons, announcing, “Computers are coming your way!” They featured a talking computer preparing viewers for a new era. In the early 1980s most participants had seen computers, Commodores and Apples, in at least one location within their school buildings, but access was constrained because of the small number of computers in the average school, limited infrastructure for planning and maintenance, and inadequate computer literacy of the *generación* providing instruction. Thus, while the public electronic gateways became more and more prevalent, school children slowly became





more aware of their existence, although not necessarily knowing fully how computers fit into their lives.

In this chapter we follow Erika Mercado, who saw

the beginning of the decade of the 80s, a time that would bring great changes in our technology, social roles, politics, and (unfortunately) fashion. I was born August 25 in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, El Paso's border city. I would spend the next eight years of my life in this region.

Important events participants shared from this period help us understand more about the culture and society in which they grew up. In 1983 the national "Just Say No" campaign against drugs was initiated. Sally Ride became the first American woman in space on the Challenger shuttle. Compact discs were released, and hackers were able to invade sensitive military computers in Los Alamos National Laboratory. While the first megabit chip was made at Bell Labs in the U.S., Apple Computer released the Macintosh personal computer and the Nintendo Entertainment System came out. The world's largest atom smasher went online in Illinois, and cyberspace was born in William Gibson's novel Neuromancer. Another participant from this chapter, Natalia Jiménez, recalled the movie "Pretty Woman" because of the enormous cell phone in it:

On March 23, 1990, the movie "Pretty Woman" was released nationwide. I remember this particular movie because there is a scene where Julia Roberts and Richard Gere are in a park and Richard is on his cell phone and Julia ends up hanging up the phone, but what I remember most of all is that the phone is huge. Back then only the powerful and elite had cell phones. Now everyone owns a cell phone!!

At the time of "Pretty Woman," Natalia's observations on cell phone technology and those "elites" who used such technologies was daily experience. Today, the introduction of cell phone technology seems like it happened an eternity ago, but it is an important snippet into realizing how quickly we are able to practice certain electronic literacies and how affordable many of them quickly become. *Generaciones* reveals just such snippets, but its difference lies in its focus on how real people, not actors, struggled with the explosion of technology between 1920 and 1985. Within the cultural ecologies of participants from this *generación* are clear pictures about the introduction of certain technologies. This group also had a good idea of the kinds of people they had the potential to become through recounts of their role models.



Gender bias begins to take a backseat as more women occupy roles traditionally associated with men. This creates hope and ambition for some of the females in the chapter. After looking back, Erika recalled the importance of particular female figures for her, such as astronaut Sally Ride and first woman vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro. “Though I didn’t know so at this time, these firsts for women served to show me that just because I was a girl there really wasn’t many limits to what we could do. Unlike previous generations, I don’t remember growing up thinking that I couldn’t do certain things because I was a girl.” Lucía Durá tells of a similar experience:

As a child I admired the women in my family. Though I saw them as individuals I thought of them more often as a more or less unified whole. Family women, devoted to their husbands, to their families. To me they seemed to agree on the same values, ideas, and even tastes; I did not really notice how different they were because I did not see them as fully autonomous. I wanted to be intelligent, strong, well-mannered, and elegant like them, but I yearned for independence. I guess I also thought I would, like them, get married one day and have my own house. My world seemed so defined by tradition and family that I knew that the possibility for other types of greatness existed outside of it, but that my own life was bound to it.

As a teenager I slowly began to see that there was much more to the world than my family. This was also because the family began to split in different directions because of living arrangements and also because of disagreements, which I did not know about then. As I saw less of my family I saw more options for myself. I also went to an all-girls school that encouraged progressive and independent thinking. This let me see that I too could be like Mother Teresa, Princess Diana, and Margaret Thatcher. I began to see that I could be a leader and that I had the potential to thrive on my own. Toward the end of high school I thought I could even be president of Mexico. I thought that at minimum I would be working on Wall Street dressed in an expensive black suit as I sat in traffic in my BMW and made phone calls from my cell phone. I guess I didn’t have someone specific in mind that I could be like, but I wanted to be successful and independent.

The motivations of the individuals in this chapter vary from person to person, but the intensity of their motivation is a common thread, showing how they persevered through positive and negative micro-tear zones in order to realize their unique visions of success.



This chapter's stories reveal expanded characteristics of the following four points: 1. Micro-Tear Zone Psychology: Better understanding of the psychology of micro-tear



zones on educational advancement and bilingual education reveals useful consequences that teachers should be aware of. 2. Home Micro-Literacy Zones: Computers in the home were once for "work only," or for the "elite," like the image of Richard Gere's cell phone in *Pretty Woman*. (See image, left, of Richard Gere from "PhoneTalk") Now the home has become a commonplace for all sorts of computer practices; we even justify this today with terms such as

multitasking and telecommuting. 3. Transport Sponsor: Unlike earlier chapters where students often could walk alone to a library or other locale, we see the dawning in this chapter of parents having to drive their children to traditional and electronic gateways. This is important for parents and educators to be aware of as we demand more and more electronic literacies from our children and students. 4. School Gateways: This chapter sheds light on participants' experiences in schools and their attempts to integrate electronic literacies into the curriculum.

Migrations from Mexico to U.S.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Birth</u>	<u>Place of Birth</u>	<u>Migration 1</u>	<u>Migrations 2-4</u>	<u>Migrations 5-6</u>	<u>Current Residence</u>
<i>Gerardo Urquiza</i>	1974	Hidalgo del Parral, MX	Juárez, MX	El Paso, TX		El Paso, TX
<i>Erika Mercado</i>	1980	Juárez, MX	El Paso, TX	Fulton, CA		El Paso, TX
<i>Gina Rosas</i>	1971	Juárez, MX				Juárez, MX
<i>Luciá Durá</i>	1977	Mexico City, MX	Panzacola, Tlaxcala, MX	Mexico City, MX, Juárez, MX, El Paso, TX, San Antonio, TX	South Bend, IN New Haven, CT	El Paso, TX



While migrations from Mexico to the U.S. are often the most prevalent migration patterns in our minds when we think of the border here, the migrations of Antonio Jiménez, Erika Mercado, Gina Rosas, and Lucía Durá are substantially varied, and beyond typical.

Señor Gerardo Urquiza was born in 1973 about 350 miles from El Paso in Hidalgo del Parral, Chihuahua, Mexico, and grew up in Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. He now lives in El Paso where he is an information specialist with the University of Texas at El Paso's IT department and is currently the technology coordinator for the university. Antonio's recollections of literacy activity around the home are similar to other participants'.

He observed his parents reading the newspaper, the Bible, and writing personal letters. He noted that "my grandfather (on my mom's side) like to read a lot. Whatever type of book, magazine, paper would fall in his hands, he would read it." (Activate video for Gerardo's expanded commentary). Such traditional literacy practices in the family and the story passed down of his grandfather's voracious reading appetite seem to play roles in how future

generaciones of family pick up this thread and, at times, because of better socioeconomic circumstances, are able to weave more complex educations in their lives. Moreover, as has been a thread throughout *Generaciones*, families "recycle" traditional and alternative literacy sources.



Gerardo's first language is Spanish, and bilingualism came later in life. He views learning English as economically driven: Only through working on his spoken English was he able to overcome his fear of speaking English with real people, especially in the workplace. When Gerardo decided he wanted to study in the U.S., he talked over the possibility with his father: "Well, my dad gave me the opportunity to attend an American University (UTEP); thing that I would always be grateful about. He said, still alive though, that a good education was going to be the only inheritance he would be able to give me."

Gerardo started speaking English at a later age, and he explained the process:



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This is a very interesting story. I lived most of my life in the border Mexico-USA, so I always was exposed to the English language. When I came to get my bachelor's degree to the United States, all my school years were always marked by the lack of communicating my self fluently in English. This was a hard experience due to the fact that I was always afraid of asking anything because I needed to structure the sentences first in Spanish, which by the way is my native tongue, and then translate it into English. Not until I started working in the IT department in the help desk area when I realized that if I wanted to succeed in my career I needed to start confronting my fear to speak in English. It's been more than five year now and I may not be as fluent as I want it but at least I not afraid of expressing myself in English. (Activate video for Gerardo's expanded commentary).



In El Paso, Texas, you hear more Spanish being spoken than English, from the UTEP campus to city hall. This is the only big city in the Southwest—I include states ranging from Arizona, California, Texas, and New Mexico—where everyone tends to speak to you in Spanish first. In other words, Gerardo did not necessarily have to worry so much about perfecting his English, but he had bigger ambitions and economic motivators in the IT department.

Since Gerardo is immersed in technology as an IT manager, it is interesting to hear of his “growing into” electronic literacies. The first time he was exposed to computers was in high school in Mexico. He remembers learning dBase 3+, compiling written applications using FoxPro, and learning GW-BASIC. His first gateway and direct sponsors were in high school. At that time his father encouraged him, because, as Gerardo explained, he felt he had a desire to learn about computers: “My dad encouraged me. I think maybe because he always wanted to learn about computers when he was young but never had the opportunity. I never was exposed to computers,

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nor attended workshop or trainings until high school.” (Activate video to right for Gerardo’s expanded commentary).

In his own home today Gerardo has created a micro-literacy zone:

I have two computers at home, both built by me. As far as characteristics go, one is a AMD Athlon 900 MHz with 660 MB of RAM, 80 GB hard drive, CD burner, DVD player and Windows XP as an OS among other beauties. The other one is a bit older in a Pentium II 600 MHz processor with 256 MB of memory and 12GB HD.



With this equipment and his job, the sorts of literacies he practices comprise a long and unexpected list: Web developing, publishing, word processing, graphic and multimedia designing, programming, and playing video games. He is the first participant to state that his work with technology started as a pastime that in turn developed into his career: “It started as a hobby, but little by little it turned out to become more serious. I use computers for a lot of things, from making payments, searching for interesting things over the Internet, learning new technologies, to designing and creating things.” While he continues practicing all sorts of advanced electronic literacies at home, his micro-literacy zone here has evolved with the wireless movement. (Activate video for



Gerardo’s expanded commentary).

Señora Erika Mercado was born in Juárez in 1980, moved to southern California at about ten years old, and now lives in El Paso. She was studying psychology at UTEP at the time of her initial survey and interview. She is now a seventh grade teacher in the Socorro Independent School District. While financially comfortable growing up, her

parents' divorce and a move to California would affect some of her learning experiences later in life.

Her grandfather, an early influential traditional sponsor, actively educated her. One story handed down by her mother and grandmother was that “I used to spend hours sitting outside with my great-grandfather (mom’s grandfather) listening to him tell me stories about the old days.” Yet another moment she remembered quite clearly took place in kindergarten or first grade when she was learning how to read in Spanish. Her grandfather took on the role of a traditional literacy sponsor who taught with alternative methods: “[H]e went as far as placing note cards all around the house so that wherever I went I had something to read. He was also very patient in helping make out all the different words and in explaining new words and their meanings as I came across them.” This form of instruction, in which the older *generación* serves as a direct sponsor for traditional literacy, disappears when it comes to electronic literacies. The older *generación* does not have the electronic literacy skills that would allow them to be directly helpful in the same traditional and alternative ways they have been with the traditional literacies of reading and writing. (Activate video for Erika’s expanded commentary).



Later, during the second half of third grade, Erika started school in the U.S. Her memories of actually learning to read and write in English cannot be pinpointed to a specific time, but “it was more of a gradual process and little by little I became more confident in my English reading and writing in and outside the class.” A significant part of the process she felt was writing book reports: “The more books you read and more book reports you wrote the more you were rewarded. . . . A teacher also had a special area designed for reading with pillows and lots of books; when you were done with your work you could go there to read and in a way take a small break from class.” She recalled one favorite fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Vaca,¹ who “was always patient and kind and always made learning fun. Mrs. Vaca created a positive micro-tear zone for Erika

¹ Pseudonym



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and always encouraged her. To this day, Mrs. Vaca remains an influential figure in her life. (Activate video for Erika's expanded commentary).

Through Erika's experience with her teacher, we see a positive micro-tear zone sponsor, who could be a parent, teacher, friend, etc., who exhibits a positive and effective mentoring role in peoples' lives.

One of her first traditional gateways "was a library close to my home in California. We were first taken there on a school field trip

and after that my parents took us there on a regular basis. I would also get books through the Scholastics order form we received in school." From her grandfather's early interest, support, and display of traditional literacy, Erika's mother and stepfather appear to have played the role of transport sponsors for her. (Activate video for Erika's expanded commentary). Transport sponsorship is an important concept to introduce because, especially in the U.S., younger participants need someone to take them to a place where they could access books (such as a library), or in the case of technology, a center or other gateway where they could access computers and other technologies. Moreover, we should note that schools do offer additional ways for students to purchase outside readings, but again this would depend upon finances.



Today I suspect that families that can afford extra books go to places like Barnes and Noble to read and socialize.² Erika recalled her early teen reading practices as traditional and alternative: "As I got older I read most teen magazines such as *Teen*, *Seventeen*, *Tiger Beat*. I also read a lot of the mystery book series popular with kids my

² John Scenters-Zapico has three children and notices that more and more on occasions like birthdays they receive gift cards from Barnes and Noble. In turn he tends to give gift cards often when his kids attend a party.



age such as the R. L. Stine and *Sweet Valley High* books.” The magazines were available at the public library or purchased and passed among friends.

When technology began to occupy an important role in play and homework, Erika



sought it out through her friends. This started out when she was young by playing video games, and continued until she was older: “Like most kids I started with video games. I would go over to my friend’s house to play Atari before I had my own. Similarly, when Nintendo was introduced and one of my friends had one before me, I would go over to play.” Play transitioned into homework at a friend’s home: “My friends were specially influential when it came to computer use, my friend Debbie in particular. Her family had a computer before mine and she allowed me to go over when we had work to do in middle

school and then high school. She taught me about the different programs and I used the Internet for the very first time at her house.” (Activate video for Erika’s expanded commentary).

Erika’s use of computers at school appears to be protocol. They were a form of reward for doing something well in class. Erika points out that “If you were really good in class you were able to use the only computer we had in our classroom. All we would use it for was a silly game that looking back on now seems pretty lame but at that time we thought it was great.” Her experience in this school gateway serves a “transitional snapshot” of how schools across the country were affected by the need to have technology. The consequence, however, is threefold. (Activate video for Erika’s expanded commentary). First, there were teachers without any preparation to teach with computers. Second, the software had little to no connection to the subjects taught in classrooms. Third, the students saw the computer used as a reward system based on class subjects. Nonetheless, the





impression computers had on Erika was powerful: "I always wanted a computer as soon as I saw them, but at that time it was mostly to play games on it."

Erika's reflection on the impact of technology on our day-to-day lives is quite



philosophical. She maturely observed the ways that technology has changed the ways we experience everyday events:

"Technologically, camcorders were introduced which forever changed the way we captured events like birthdays, weddings, babies' first and other important life events," but she is also cautious in viewing the role that the introduction of the personal laptop has in her life. Erika wisely notes that "in 1984 Apple computer released the Macintosh personal computer and now technology could follow us everywhere, but so could our work." (Activate

video for Erika's expanded commentary).

*Señora Gina Rosas*³ was born in 1971 in Juárez, Mexico, and still lives there. She is pursuing her MA in Computer Information Systems at UTEP and has held a host of jobs in which she has used technology: geographic information manager, webmaster, computer tutor, administrative assistant, system and paralegal assistant, and communications manager. As a graduate student Gina commutes every day to UTEP from Juárez and works as a 911 GIS programmer in the U.S. The route she experienced in getting her job and becoming a graduate student was not a typical lifelong passion or hobby.

Her story began with what she calls her "angels," an American couple for whom her mother worked as a housekeeper: "I was very lucky to have the support of an American couple (my angels). They decided to pay for my education in El Paso, Texas, since my parents could not afford it. Everybody was so happy for me except myself. I wanted to go to 'La Secundaria' (middle school) with my friends." The role the American couple played in her life cannot be underestimated. Without their support she may never have attended any advanced studies in the U.S. or Mexico.

³ A student in one of Scenters-Zapico's classes.



Her writing and reading activities help us understand that she always had an eye on writing and reading, not as goals or assignments, but as activities she enjoyed:

I used to write letters to my friends, mostly in Spanish. I enjoyed some of my writing courses since we had to write essays about our lives. It was sometimes kind of hard to translate Spanish to English. At the time, I would have to think in Spanish first and then translate my sentences in English. . . . I read music and fashion magazines. I also recall reading the lyrics of my favorite songs and trying to understand the meaning.

Gina saw her first computer in a computer course in the business high school, Lydia Patterson Institute, in El Paso. In that class she “was asked to write a computer program in BASIC. I wrote it and I got a 100. I thought it was very easy and the grade inspired me to study computers.” In high school she started a part-time job, which served as an important cubbyhole gateway for her future career: “When i was a senior in high school i got a job at a lawyers office called frank smith and smith.⁴ one of my tasks was to close files using a warehouse computer program. i also was a runner, a secretary, a receptionist and i even started troubleshooting simple computer problems.” However, her choice to study computer programming was not yet solidified. Her goal to be a detective was still alive until she took a criminal law course:

[I had] a vague idea of being a detective even when the thought of studying computers was more prevalent. Anyways, I enrolled in a criminal law course to try it out. I was so bored that I almost fall sleep. I did not focus and understand a word they were saying. I immediately thought that law was not for me. Therefore, I enrolled in computer programming courses instead.

Despite her new found interest and career choice, her family could never afford a computer. Through her gateway at UTEP, she used computers often and realized she needed her own for her studies, so she bought one on credit while at UTEP in 1998:

Before that time, I spent long hours at the computer labs at community college and UTEP. I remember I bought a cheap computer that was about four hundred dollars. It had Windows 3.x on it. Then I bought my first real computer that was \$2,500.00. It was very expensive at the time. My dad gave me a thousand dollars. The rest of the money was paid with a credit card. It was kind of a nice

⁴ Pseudonym.



sacrifice and I remember I was very excited. It was a Hewlett Packard Pavilion—333 MHz and 64MB of RAM.

She was her own direct sponsor when she purchased a short-lived first computer, and later her father served as an indirect electronic literacy sponsor. Important in her narrative is that the two technology gateways at EPCC and UTEP played important roles in allowing her to complete assignments and learn new computer literacies. Gina's exposure to and practice of electronic literacies is what I would now consider "mainstream" in this *generación*. She seamlessly melds technology uses for work, school, and leisure.

Early on she said she mostly used her computer for schoolwork, especially since her degree was in computer information systems, but "Up to this day, I continue using it for school, work, and leisure. It has become a great part of my life since I constantly have to be learning new technologies for graduate courses and for my job." At home she often chats, emails, reads, and uses the Internet for research for school and leisure. In closing, Gina said she has been involved in a number of activities that only someone with her specialized technological knowledge would know how to perform, such as decrypting, shrinking, decoding, and burning.

Co-author of this chapter, Señora Lucía Durá commuted to the United States to attend school since she was five years old, but due to life circumstances her stay has been prolonged as she continues to pursue an education in the U.S. Born in Mexico City in 1977, she is a PhD student in Rhetoric and Writing Studies at UTEP. Because Lucía has decided to use the pronoun "I," I (Scenters-Zapico) have used a different font and italics to separate my commentary of how her experiences fit into the overall developing narratives in Generaciones.

My story is one of "riches to rags," and of resilience. I was born in Mexico City, and come from an affluent family. As a child I had everything I needed, and Santa Claus was good to me, so I can say that I had material things. (Activate video for Lucía's





expanded commentary). I had access to books, great schools, and like my parents and their parents, a bilingual education. My family lived in Mexico City, the city of Puebla, and the small town of Panzacola, Tlaxcala, in central Mexico. We moved to the border city of Ciudad Juárez when I was three years old. My earliest memories of literacy experience begin at that age.

I was exposed at three years old to the alphabet and to words. My first traditional sponsor, my mother, was extremely encouraging and supportive. She not only did her best to answer as many questions as my curiosity would spur, but she would also have me practice my reading on anything: billboards, cereal boxes, shampoo bottles, soda cans, literally anything I would attempt to read.

These alternative literacy practices and the encouragement by older sponsors appear to be a motivational force for young participants who later continue with a passion to read. Despite being from a wealthy family, some of her reading practices and objects are also practiced by less affluent participants.

My father, grandparents, and other family members were never discouraging as I learned to read, but I don't remember them being involved. What I did notice is that they read, and through their own avid reading I can say that they became indirect sponsors of my own literacy.

When I talk about "riches to rags" and "resilience," I refer to the negative events and influences in my life. Without going into too much detail, I can say that I grew up with an alcoholic father who was abusive to my mother and who ended up abandoning us when I was in high school. In so many ways, my father was a negative influence, and I might even say he was a negative sponsor. Of the many memories I have of his neglect, the one that stands out the most was when I was in high school studying for a government test. He asked me why I cared to study and read so much if I would never amount to anything. I was puzzled. I was and had always been an A student.

Her father's comments are an example of a negative micro-tear zone. In this instance the destructive psychological criticism comes from a parent, not a teacher, but the effects are equally destructive. Unlike Mrs. Vaca, who was a specific positive micro-tear zone sponsor for Erika, Lucía's father exhibits a negative role in her life, suggesting he was a negative micro-tear zone sponsor. As parents and educators, we need to be aware of the words we choose, even when criticizing, when we comment to our students and our children.



I speak about this experience because it helps me to highlight my most important sponsors of literacy, the people who filled me with confidence every day that I left my house feeling empty: my teachers. I was one of those students with a home life tumultuous and unstable enough to fall through the cracks (despite well-appreciated and concerted efforts from my mother and her parents). Many of my elementary, middle, and high school teachers made sure I didn't by sending me back home with enough confidence and will to confront almost anything. They did not reach sponsor



status by merely telling me that I was great. I think my teachers challenged me to read in English, my second language, as if it were my first. They saw my ideas on paper, in artwork, and oral presentations and encouraged me through praise and constructive criticism. My teachers gave me space to shine, and I felt motivated knowing that in school I could succeed. (Activate video for Lucía's expanded commentary).

Lucía was fortunate in that her teachers became positive micro-tear zone sponsors, creating an antidote to her

negative micro-tear zone at home. As educators we need to pay attention to not only how we treat our "regular" students but also we heed the signs of students who come from homes that have damaged their sense of self-worth and value.

When my father left us and I graduated high school I knew my teachers wouldn't be there anymore, and I challenged myself to do well in college, get a job, and get married. I accomplished all three—really fast—and I learned that speed can lead to hasty decisions as three years later I joined the one out of two in divorce statistics. But within those seven years I used the computer programming and email skills that I learned with Friar Schmidt⁵ in high school. I typed my papers out on Microsoft Word, and I took two accounting classes which forced me to learn Excel. I also began to work as a writing tutor and learned database management through Access. I realize now that Friar Schmidt was my first direct electronic literacy sponsor. I had used computers through elementary and middle school, but it was in high school that I learned about the binary numbers and programming inputs that went on behind the screen. It was that depth in understanding that allowed me to get a good grasp of all things Microsoft and Adobe.

⁵ Pseudonym



Luciá's next opportunities and experiences served to determine what she believes is her career as a teacher. The balance of tutor and teacher, serving in the roles of positive sponsor, and being positively sponsored herself at the same time was incomparable.

To be a writing tutor was important for me. I was an international student and was ineligible for financial aid, but I could work on campus for twenty hours per week. Any job would have been fine, but mine was one in the literacy realm. I could have worked at the cafeteria or the Subway line, but I didn't. That has made all of the difference in the direction my life has taken. After spending five years in San Antonio, Texas, attending college and working for one year as a Spanish teacher (my only qualification was the fact that I was born in Mexico!), I moved with my then-husband to Connecticut so that he could pursue a graduate degree. Nonetheless I worked hard, sometimes four jobs at a time to support my household. My main and most important job was as a project coordinator for a faith-based women's initiative to fight AIDS in Africa. At that point I acquired another integral sponsor of literacy as my supervisor, a distinguished professor of ethics, who gave me my first assignment: read fourteen books on feminism and feminist theology. I did, and I also worked on a refurbished Dell emailing women in over twenty countries and arranging their travel and logistics for a conference. I was presented as a "colleague," a title I knew I did not deserve but one that I tried to live up to. Once again, a teacher made me rise to the occasion.

So all of this is perhaps why I have now become a teacher, and now I am the one who encourages students and who asks them to give their best. I challenge students to read and to read in new ways as I present to them the same technology gateways that were presented to me just a few years ago: multimedia, multimodal projects—make your work move. Invention, visual rhetoric, discourse communities, writing as a social act, all of these gateways I have been encouraged to use by UTEP faculty. It is so much easier to find motivation within when there are sponsors and gateways.



Migrations from the U.S. to Mexico

Name	Birth	Place of Birth	Migration 1	Migration 2	Current Residence
<i>Alexa Cárdenas</i>	1976	El Paso, TX	Nazas, Durango, MX	El Paso, TX	El Paso, TX
<i>Martin Castro</i>	1978	El Paso, TX	Juárez, MX	El Paso, TX	El Paso, TX
<i>Antonio Jiménez</i>	1974	El Paso, TX	Juárez, MX	El Paso, TX	El Paso, TX

When I was a teenager most of my family lived in El Paso, Texas, and Juárez, Mexico. We taught about the United States as a country of opportunities, but my grandparents did not like the city's lifestyle. My grandparents were happy that I was going to study in the United States because they wanted the best for me. At the same time they were very sad because I would have to leave home in Durango and start a new life by myself without them. (Participant Alexa Cárdenas)

Alexa Cárdenas, Martin Castro, and Antonio Jiménez were all born in the U.S. but moved at birth and were raised in Mexico. It seems more and more that in this border made up of natural barriers like the Rio Grande and precipitous Franklin Mountains, even more imposing barriers created by the U.S. government through its policies, bridges, and barbed wire fences prevail. Psychologically, it is a border of displaced family, culture, and language. The following story by Alexa Cárdenas is just one of the many in this chapter, but it is one that haunts this entire research project.

Señora Alexa Cárdenas is a housewife and full-time student at the University of Texas at El Paso. Born in El Paso in 1976, her family moved that same year to Nazas, Durango, Mexico, which is located almost 600 miles south of El Paso. Like many close-knit Latina families, the separation from extended family was viewed as both a blessing and a bane.

Her home in Nazas was “a typical white townhome with trees and a nice garden. It has three bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom. The back yard is huge and it has a big kind of a swimming pool and there is a special area for pecan trees and other specialty trees.” Alexa learned to read and write in this home. It was here where her first



educational memories surfaced. In first grade her grandmother became an important direct traditional literacy sponsor:

I was having a lot of trouble learning to read and one afternoon my mother (grandmother) showed me the letters and the sounds; that afternoon I learned to read. The explanation was so simple and clear that I understood the concept of reading. I would never forget that day.

An important comment occurs here when Alexa refers to her grandmother as a mother, and then clarifies this. Grandparents can be some of the most influential direct traditional and indirect electronic literacy sponsors. Grandmothers often become the caretakers while parents work or for children from a single-parent household. Four important observations of their role can be summarized at this point. First, participants raised by their grandparents all recall the grandparents involved in traditional literacy practices such as reading the Bible and making lists. Second, their grandparents consistently stressed the importance of reading, writing, and education. Third, the grandparents, despite having little formal education, were also the ones who ensured that their grandchildren gained the proper tools to keep up with electronic literacies by pushing for the parents to purchase a computer for the grandchildren. In this way they served vital indirect sponsorship roles. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, the *generaciones* of family members who were not educated with electronic literacies were unable to directly sponsor their children or grandchildren in the ways that they were able to perform with direct traditional literacy sponsorship.

Despite her grandmother's love and support, Alexa was not a spoiled child. Since a young age she had to be mature, even taking on the role of parent. Once she finished her day at school, she would take "care of my half-brothers. I picked them up from school, cooked, and fed them. After that, I cleaned the kitchen and prepared their uniforms for the next day." Fortunately her grandparents provided a loving and nurturing environment for her, which she in turn offered to her younger stepbrothers.

Alexa made a choice while in high school in Naza to move to El Paso and finish high school here. What is now becoming clear from these stories and is important for bilingual educators is that these participants become bilingual and bicultural through complete immersion in the language and culture. This is enhanced minimally by second language instruction. She came not knowing English, but "started to speak English after a year." Her comment, "a big challenge that I had to overcome," about the language, the culture, and the distance, is perhaps the most overlooked component in second language learning.



It was at her new high school in El Paso that she had her first contact with computers in a computer class. At this gateway, “We did not use computers in our daily lives; we just use them in the computer class.” The role for technology was quite limited and her teachers “did not place an active role in the use of computers. I think that computers were slowly introduced in the classrooms but nobody was prepared to use them.” These first indirect sponsors, her teachers, “did not have a plan on how to introduce students to computers.” Alexa’s comment is consistent with many students across the nation of this era regardless of race. While to a lesser degree today, I suspect her observation that teachers are under-prepared still holds true in many places. Teacher-sponsors, more often than not, must attempt to train students without any training of their own. Pedagogically, these teachers more likely than not attempted traditional practices with limited success. Oftentimes, the software applications then and now were incongruous with the class subject matter, so while technology gateways were available, they were not exactly accessible.

A few years later Alexa married and enrolled in college. It was at this time that she felt the urgency to use a personal computer at home for schoolwork. “My husband and I decided to buy a computer because I needed it to complete my assignments on time and at home.” Like several married participants, the couple made the choice to purchase the computer in a joint sponsorship: they both agreed they needed one, researched it, and purchased it, as opposed to one member deciding and making the purchase. Together they created a home gateway to make Alexa’s schoolwork more manageable. The computer cost approximately \$1,800.00, a big investment, “but I needed the computer.” With this computer she was ready to learn and enhance her education.

Señor Martin Castro was born in El Paso in 1978, lived for five years in Juárez, Mexico, and has lived in El Paso for the last twenty-two years, where he earned his GED and is an electrician by trade. He grew up with his father in a single-family home. His father had a low-paying job and they had little money. When describing his home Martin was brief, saying only, “It was a low class neighborhood and the whole house was two small rooms.” (Activate video for Martin’s expanded commentary). Compared to most of the other participants, it was clear that he





did not enjoy school or the teachers he had there. His secondary school was five blocks from his house and he said “it looked like a prison.” Unlike Lucía Durá’s experience in private school where she received extra attention from her teachers, Martin did not care for school or his teachers: “They were all my least favorite because they didn’t care about anybody.” His experiences at home were also consistent with this view: “I never wrote anything. I didn’t enjoy writing letters and I didn’t do my schoolwork.” At home “nobody read anything except bills.” Obviously, different socioeconomic backgrounds create different memories.

Despite Martin’s low interest in school and his negative experience with sponsors, his curiosity for computers came at a young age, and he “was very interested in learning how to use computers.” At first he used them to play games. No one in his family gave much value to computers. While his sisters and brothers felt they were important, most of his family viewed them as unimportant. Martin’s most prevalent memory of a



technology gateway came when he was fifteen, when he first learned to use a computer in a high school computing class. (Activate video for Martin’s expanded commentary).

He could not recall the year when the first computer came into his family home, but it was after he married. The computer came from “my father-in-law because he did not need it.” At that time he says he never used a computer for reading and writing email or letters, but by 1998 he used it frequently for playing computer games and visiting chat rooms. Today he occasionally uses email and does some research on the Web; in both cases he taught himself at home. Martin’s father-in-law was an indirect sponsor, but Martin self-sponsored in order to practice electronic literacies.

Martin, the only skilled tradesperson I interviewed, shared some final thoughts on the role technology would play in everyday jobs. His views reiterate the increasing and important roles that cubbyhole gateway jobs will provide in the future. From an electrician’s perspective, he reflected for a moment on technology’s role: “Everything is going to be computers right down to manual labor.” Nevertheless, he does not use computers to write reports or other documents for work, preferring instead to write them



all by hand. It is possible that for Martin or future *generaciones* working in his company, the desire to learn to use technology in the workplace will be a direct result of economic motivators, and then the workplace becomes fertile ground for electronic cubbyholes, technology gateways, and direct sponsors of the future.

*Señor Antonio Jiménez*⁶ is currently a UTEP student majoring in accounting. In his previous occupations he was an accounting assistant, and he aims to become a Certified Public Accountant. Antonio was born in El Paso in 1974, grew up in Juárez, and moved back to El Paso while he completes his degree at UTEP. Antonio has always liked to write—he even enjoys writing summaries of books he reads—a trait that shows determination in making the best of a mix of positive and negative sponsors and experiences.



Vivíamos comodamente. Recuerdo que durante mi niñez vivíamos en una vecindad muy pobre del centro de la ciudad. Mi mamá trabajaba vendiendo comida mexicana en un mercado popular también en el centro de la ciudad, mi padre era comerciante ambulante, vendía fruta y verduras en la calle, aunque todos vivíamos en la misma casa recuerdo que nunca me faltó nada, ni alimentos, ni casa, ni ropa, por esta razón creo que vivíamos cómodamente.

Antonio explained that before his parents got divorced his family lived in a small house with only two bedrooms. His mother later bought a slightly larger house and remarried.

When speaking of his father and his view toward education, Antonio said,




Mi papá de muy joven se vino a de un pueblo en el sur de México a esta frontera con la intención de trabajar y superarse. Desgraciadamente para el dinero era más importante que la educación. Con mucho trabajo salió adelante y cosecho dinero. En algunas ocasiones lo miraba leer el periódico y me preguntaba si asistió alguna vez a la escuela. Un día le pregunte y me dijo que solo había ido a la escuela durante un año pero que al menos identificaba las letras y sabía (con mucho esfuerzo) el significado de algunas palabras.

Like his father, Antonio's mother attended school only for a few years. She too learned to read and write, but because her school was in a remote location and she had many chores to do, advanced schooling was an impossibility for her. However, she realized


⁶ A student in one of Scenters-Zapico's classes.




the importance and value of obtaining an education and made sure Antonio took advantage of any opportunity he could:

 Quizás debido a la situación económica que mi familia sufrió cuando era yo muy chico, el tema de la educación siempre fue comentado por mi madre y mis hermanos. Mi madre me decía que si quería ser alguien importante en la vida tenía que estudiar mucho. Que la educación es lo que nos hace diferentes con respecto a otras personas. Quizás mi madre me negó algunas veces algún juguete o algún dulce o quizás ropa cara que me gustaba pero lo que nunca se negó a comprarme fue libros y artículos para la escuela.

So while Antonio may have been denied a toy or clothes that would have made him feel more attractive at school, his mother ensured that he always had necessary school supplies and any books that he desired. Despite not having much money, his mother sent a clear message about electronic and traditional literacy practices.

 Antonio's brother was another direct traditional literacy sponsor for Antonio. His brother liked to read books by Carlos Fuentes and Gabriel García Márquez: "Mi hermano me regalo sus libros cuando se caso y me dijo que si los leía iba a ver al mundo de una forma distinta." The practice of "recycling" books among family and friends is common enough in families who cannot afford to go out and purchase books regularly.

For Antonio the road to a college education wasn't easy. He tried to enroll in the systems engineering major at the Tecnológico de Monterrey de Ciudad Juárez but was not admitted. Moreover, once he moved to El Paso and took English as a second language classes for four years, he felt he had wasted his time:

 El mundo se me vino encima porque pensé que mi oportunidad de estudiar se venia abajo. Sin embargo decidí, después de muchos años regresar a mi país de origen—Estados Unidos. Fue entonces que me registre en el Colegio de la Comunidad de la ciudad de El Paso, Texas (EPCC). Ahí tomé mis primeras clases de ingles como segunda lengua (ESOL). Estuve aproximadamente cuatro años tomando esas clases sin ningún resultado positivo.

Antonio commented that the ESOL curriculum was problematic in that it did not offer students incentives or motivation to learn English well. He said that he finished the six ESOL courses and proceeded to enroll in the core courses in English, which were challenging because everything was in a new language with area-specific terminologies, and he had to submit oral and written assignments. Antonio remembered, however, that

with the help of a few dedicated faculty he finally learned to read and write in English. The role of positive micro-tear zone sponsors in second language acquisition setting has made a significant impact in Antonio's life.

El Paso Born and Raised

Name	Birth	Place of Birth	Migration 1	Current Residence
Corina Jiménez	1977	El Paso, TX		El Paso, TX
Sofía González	1977	El Paso, TX		El Paso, TX
Natalia Jiménez	1978	El Paso, TX	Clint, TX	El Paso, TX

These three participants are the living, breathing human beings who challenge national literacy studies depicting El Paso as an uneducated city. Instead, by focusing on Corina Jiménez, Sofía González, and Natalia Jiménez from behind a Lankshear and Knobel ontological lens, we appreciate how they paved their futures with a deliberate dedication to succeed.

Señora Corina Jiménez,⁷ born in 1977 in El Paso, Texas, is an auto claims adjuster and



is working on her MA in Professional Writing and Rhetoric at UTEP. Corina's story of learning English and Spanish and her switch to practicing each at different times in her life is a lesson in situated dual language learning. Corina considers Spanish her first language, though today her primary language is English. She began speaking English in kindergarten, and recalled to this day sitting in her classroom wondering if she knew English: "I could understand everyone and once the teacher called on me to tell everyone my name, I said it and was relieved that everyone understood me. That has

always stayed with me." In El Paso, even though it is in the U.S., it is easy to not be exposed to English in stores, restaurants, TV, radio, or any other day-to-day activities. (Activate video for Corina's expanded commentary).

⁷ A student in one of Scenters-Zapico's classes.



Generaciones' Narratives

From an early age Corina and her sister were encouraged to read. An education for the two sisters was never in question. Gender played no issue in determining the careers of the women. At home her parents encouraged Corina to read, and she saw herself as an avid reader, always asking her parents to purchase books from the Scholastic Books brochures she would receive from school. If her parents ever noticed that she or her sister were not doing well in a school subject, they made them go to tutoring or restricted their extracurricular activities. College was in turn no exception: "My parents never gave us the option of whether we would go to college. They always spoke about 'when' we would go." While talking about education Corina lit up with some memories of the role of bilingual education in her home. Her mother was born in Arizona and grew up speaking Spanish, but her mother's and father's stories of their school years are distinct. Her mother "caught on to learning English very fast . . . but had the advantage

that both her parents were bilingual." Both of Corina's parents finished high school. Her mother attended El Paso Community College and International Business College (IBC)⁸ for job training and was able to get a job from this education. As a matter of fact, she was the valedictorian at IBC and wrote her speech. (Activate video on left for Corina's expanded commentary).

Her father, she reflected, tells us stories of how he was held back in school because he



did not know English. My dad came to the United States when he was twelve and was placed in an all English-speaking classroom. At that time there were no bilingual classes and [students were] not allowed to speak Spanish in any of the schools in El Paso. My dad was held back that year but the following year he caught on so fast he was promoted back to the



⁸ In El Paso.



grade he was supposed to be in. (Activate video on bottom of previous page for Corina's expanded commentary). He learned on his own without the help of his parents because they were both Spanish speakers as well.

Her father went to EPCC and UTEP, obtaining his associate degree from EPCC. Advanced degrees and bilingualism were crucial.

In elementary school she vividly recalled two teachers who inspired her with educational goals. Each serves as a micro-tear zone, one positive, one negative. Both served as traditional literacy sponsors, but each in different ways. Her fifth-grade teacher, Mr. Jones,⁹ always encouraged her and never gave up on his students: "He once told me that I had to believe I was good at something and then it would come naturally to me. He always told me if I thought I couldn't do it than I wouldn't be able to. He simply asked that we try before we give up." As a negative micro-tear zone sponsor, her memories of her sixth-grade teacher, Mrs. Davidson,¹⁰ "are not as pleasant."



Corina tells me that Mrs. Davidson had students write stories and ideas of whatever they wanted in a blank book. In this teacher's case she recalled that when the teacher returned her book to her she had written degrading comments in the book. Corina felt discouraged, but quipped, "I remember her when people tell me I can't do something. It makes me want to do it even more." (Activate video for Corina's expanded commentary). While the negative micro-tear zone ended in a positive manner, teachers need to exercise great care and caution with the negative comments they make about their students.

Obviously, Corina's memory still haunts her to this day.

As was expected, Corina went to college, where she became aware of computers, yet the exposure was varied and depended on her teachers. Her English professors never stressed the use of computers, but her business professors adamantly advocated computer use for projects and presentations:

⁹ Pseudonym

¹⁰ Pseudonym



I didn't really realize how important UTEP felt computers were until I entered the Undergraduate Learning Center at UTEP. I was a TA for a freshman English course that was being taught in a classroom with a computer at every desk. There was really no need for that. It was more of a distraction for the students because they would sign on to the computers and email each other instead of paying attention to the lessons. I still don't understand why you would put an English class in that setting.

Her description yields two thematic points. Her first sponsors were in the business realm where she needed to communicate her classroom projects with her teachers and her peers. The use in these settings closely parallels what is expected of employees in business settings. Second, as unfortunately happens in many freshman writing classes, the teachers are untrained and unprepared or have no idea of how to manage or conduct a classroom in an electronic setting.

In 1993 Corina's parents became indirect sponsors when they bought the family's first computer, creating a home gateway for the whole family. "My dad for work, for my sister who was in college and for me who had to write a lot for my classes [for high school].

My mom wanted it to help her develop her computer skills as well." Corina is one of the few participants who understood the pinch such an expense can place on a family. She recalled many of the details even today:

The computer was charged on my parent's Circuit City card; the only way they could afford it was if they could pay the card on a monthly basis instead of as a lump sum payment. I can't recall how much the computer cost. I was a teenager and didn't really pay attention to those details back then. I do know the computer definitely put a cramp in my parents' budget but they felt it was very much worth the expense.

Corina's reflections now, however, incorporate the economic impact of purchasing technology for the home:

I think the factor that made it harder to develop electronic literacy was more economic. In my case, we were fortunate to eventually have purchased a computer but with many of my friends, their parents struggled a little more and could not afford one. They did not feel it was a necessity and simply had them go to school to type papers or look for information on the Internet. I think in many low-income families, sacrifices have to be made and if a paper or assignment



can get done without the use of the computer at home, they will focus on what is needed at the time.

Corina feels it is imperative for educators and society to be aware of the educational impact that not being able to afford technology, which the economic divide can and does have on learning.

In closing, she talked about what she felt about electronic literacy teaching and access to technology. She sums up quite clearly the “visible” impact as well as the “less visible” consequences:

I think the educational system places much value on computer use and tends to take it for granted that most people can afford a computer. The reason school can be difficult if you don't own a computer is because of assignments in class that require you have a computer. For those who cannot afford one they have to make special trips to school just to use a computer or have to use a relative's or friend's computer. I think that teachers and professors have to stay on top of their students or even two steps ahead of them and learn the newest updates, software, websites that sell papers so that they are not fooled by students.

Teachers, however, are also incorporating the computer in the classroom more and may be forgetting to show their students how to go to the library for research as well.

On the one hand, we see that schools play a vital technology gateway role, making it possible for lower economic groups to have access and practice vital electronic literacy skills. Additionally, perhaps more in this region where extended family and friends play a significant role, they too serve as crucial sponsors and gateways in acquiring needed literacies. On the other hand, she sees the loss of traditional skills, like library research, as being overlooked by teachers.

Señora Sofía González,¹¹ born in 1977, is a student at UTEP, while also working at her grandparents' dry cleaning business. She described her home life as warm and comfortable:

I grew up in a two-story cream-colored adobe house. My parents had it built to their specifications when I was just finishing elementary school. Each of us had

¹¹ A student in one of Scenters-Zapico's classes.



our own bedroom and we had a balcony and a huge backyard. The great room was spacious and airy with lots of windows and wood shutters in every room. My parents had a private bath with a Jacuzzi and a huge walk-in closet. My sister and I shared a bathroom that connected our bedrooms (kind of like the Brady Bunch) but we had our own closets and individual styles. My brother had his own bathroom (because he was the only boy) and a bigger closet than mine. The yard was built specifically for a family with kids. We had a basketball court, a collapsible volleyball net, a tetherball pole and a pool. My parents said they had the house built that way so that they could entertain both for themselves and for us. We had some good parties in that house.

In this environment, Sofía's family stressed the importance of getting a good education because of the hardships her grandparents had endured. Her grandfather, who was the son of migrant farm workers, quit school when he was thirteen and still in third grade.

Almost in heroic terms, she retold what amounts to the family legend passed down from *generación* to *generación*:

He started life out with determination and ambition to provide a good home for his family, and he succeeded. He now owns several businesses which he runs with the help of my grandmother and oldest son. He had six children, of which four received college degrees.

Her grandmother from the U.S. completed high school and went on to a trade school, where she learned typing and secretarial skills, which she uses to this day while helping with the family's businesses.

In Sofía's home she observed traditional literacy activities that amount to an obsession:

My mother is almost as bad as I am about reading. She read everything she could get her hands on. When she was younger she read lots of romances and later she turned to biographies. She was always studying too, so there were always textbooks lying around the house that she was always submersing herself in.

Sofía's own love of books and reading followed a clear path since middle school: I spent a lot of time in the school library, especially in junior high school. Every morning and usually lunchtime was spent in the stacks. The librarians were more like mothers than the keepers of books. They understood me and I always



had first pick of the new books. In high school though, I got a job and the bookstore became my favorite place to hang out. Then came Barnes and Noble and I found heaven.

Like her mother, Sofía is an avid reader, to the point that her parents had to control her obsession:

My parents complained because I read so fast that I went through books in a matter of days rather than taking the usual weeks. I never went anywhere without a book in my purse, and they had to force me to leave it behind when we went to dinner with friends or even the movies. I read in the car, outside on a blanket in the grass, in front of the television, and even once in a tree. I went through a *Baby-sitters Club* phase, a *Nancy Drew* phase, a *Hardy Boys* phase and, yes, even a romance novel phase.

Her out-of-school traditional literacy with writing is much the same as her reading experiences: “I can’t remember a time when I didn’t keep a journal, though they usually became places for my ideas and poetry to find homes. I always carried one in my backpack alongside my novel or two of the day. I was always scribbling or reading.”

The stories of families who struggle with bilingualism on the border are as varied as the fluency levels in each language. For Sofía her first and only language is English. The language dynamic in this region is unquestionably complex. It is expected that if you have a Spanish surname, whether with light or dark skin, you must speak Spanish. In El Paso a movement away from Spanish and even from Mexican culture has long been at play with successful Latino/as (Vila, Crossing). The goal is to avoid having an accent in English. The way to achieve this is to never learn Spanish, which means avoiding Mexican culture. In Sofía’s case she told me, “I always spoke English. Spanish was actually the problem for me. I used to make up Spanish words and talk gibberish to other kids who didn’t speak English as though they could just understand me.” As a child, the gibberish allowed her to feel she fit in, where she felt she should have with Spanish.

Sofía’s first computer experience was in a junior high school computer science class, where the students worked on “the really old systems where you had to program everything into the system to make it do anything. There were lots of <RUNPROGRAM> lessons and we even got to play a couple of games on them.” She enjoyed this experience and looked forward to more like it, yet first she had to



experience Mr. Applegate:¹² “The way Mr. Applegate’s classroom worked was we played first and then we drilled. I can’t describe the complete boredom I experienced typing ASDF JKL; over and over to learn the keys. There was nothing interesting in that class and it did nothing to inspire me to further my education in computers.” Another computer teacher adapted her pedagogy to the students:

Mrs. Sorenson’s¹³ class was totally different. She taught us how to use different programs. Made sure that our typing skills were up to par by creating competitions and encouraging us to use our computer skills in real life situations by creating projects where we had to use them to create businesses, promote inventions, and manage household accounts. Her class was invigorating and exciting and made me want to learn more.

These varied experiences came in the high school where, at one point, she exclaimed “[I] couldn’t get the damned thing to do anything” because of the complexity of the operating system, yet once she was able to access the Web, her view vividly altered: “One story is that the first time I went into a chat room I couldn’t figure out how to say anything or read anything for that matter. Then a few years later I couldn’t get out because I had met so many interesting people.” This form of literacy practice within chat rooms, which may serve as a social haven for many who are not comfortable socializing in “physical” public spaces, is more and more dominant today. The effects are both positive and negative, as we see in the mainstream media on a daily basis.

At the time of my interview with Sofia she owned a HP Pavilion MX50, which was about four years old and, she says, “Basically that means it’s out of style. I’m working on buying a Dell laptop¹⁴ this semester because I need to be able to tote my computer around with me wherever I go. I have a ten-year-old laptop available to me at work, but it has lots of problems.” At UTEP she can use “some good computers during lab hours, and I have other family members who lend me the use of their computers in emergencies.” What is clear is that she is aware of both sponsors and gateways that have led to her success in school and with her advancing electronic literacies.

I was especially interested in hearing from this affluent participant of the ways she learned and practiced electronic literacies. To begin, she appears to have learned most

¹² Pseudonym.

¹³ Pseudonym.

¹⁴ Sofia was a member in one of Scenters-Zapico’s classes, and she purchased a new laptop at the end of the term. I remember it as a Dell laptop with a 21” monitor.



of her electronic literacies outside the home, in public institutions. For email she is self-taught and learned at home, yet “I got lots of help learning this from my English teachers in high school. They took us to the library and gave us lessons.” Other literacies, like PowerPoint, were learned at UTEP in a class and through a friend who taught her. Sofía epitomizes the now-seamlessness of technology in any phase of her life. No longer is technology seen as only work:

My friends are as dependant on their PCs as I am. We use them for school, to keep in contact with one another and to keep in touch with the world. They provide us with entertainment and with information and also a sense of where we are in the world. PCs enable us to do things that we never imagined ten years ago and it's still expanding.

When we look to the previous chapter and how the participants viewed technology in the future, we indeed see what she means. As Sofía was a student of mine, she noted in her cultural ecology assignment:

Today I enjoy a wide variety of computers and electronics. I have a PC at home [with] broadband Internet. I have a digital camera, a photo printer, a regular printer, a laptop which goes everywhere with me. I use flash drives instead of floppy disks and I use an MP3 player instead of my CD player. It wasn't so long ago that computers were a mystery to me and I find myself learning more and more every day. Until I did this project I didn't realize how much computers and technology have affected my life and how much a part of my world they actually are. From movies to music to presentations like this one, computers are one luxury I can't imagine living without.

*Señora Natalia Jiménez*¹⁵ was born in 1978 in El Paso, Texas, grew up in nearby Clint, Texas, and “all around El Paso.” In stark contrast to Sofía, she did not have a home gateway or family sponsors. In a nutshell, she is an example of an individual who grew up surrounded by all that she did not want to become. As a result we will discover a young woman who knew at an early age that education could be the way out of the life that surrounded her.

In describing her home she provided less an image of place and more of an insight into the people and conditions with which she struggled:

¹⁵ A student in one of Scenters-Zapico's classes.



I lived in several places growing up. The first place I recall would be when my parents were still together, we lived in a three bedroom house. It was home. Then my father got a job in Clint and we moved into a trailer . . . still home. Then my parents divorced and we went to live with my godmother and her family . . . crowded. Then we went to live with my grandmother . . . not home. Then we eventually moved into a house in back of my grandmother's house . . . seemed like home. This is the place we stayed the longest so I will describe this place . . . We lived between Alameda and Northloop. It was a one-room house for the three of us (mom, sister and myself). It had a bathroom, living room (which was also my sister's bedroom), kitchen and one closet for all of us.

Natalia had little to say about her parents. Her father was "MIA," had an elementary education, and is now in jail.

It took several conversations with Natalia to understand some of her early literacy memories, but little by little I came to more insights into her shaping as an articulate and intelligent young woman. Her mother was problematic as well: "There really was no value on reading and writing. There really wasn't any mothering involved. I hate to be straightforward, but why beat around the bush? She wasn't around to parent and give support." She did recall, however, that her mother was a negative micro-tear zone sponsor in helping her with spelling words as a child, "but she was brutal." Her mother would make Natalia give her a spelling test to see if she knew the words. Natalia humorously added, "Of course she did . . . at that age who doesn't know how to spell? Cat, dog, roof, door, etc. She was odd in her parenting but I guess didn't do too bad; I'm not in jail or no drugs.....HEE HEE."

Natalia had mentioned that her father only spoke Spanish, so I wanted to discover what role bilingualism and biculturalism played in her household and her education. Her responses, particularly from the school side, are sadly typical of many border communities like El Paso. She indicated that she remembered her first language was Spanish because her father only spoke Spanish. Once her father and mother divorced, she started speaking only English, which was also enforced in the local schools. At school an unwritten but very much enforced "English Only" rule existed. The psychological ramifications reverberate in every facet of her life, as well as in those of many other Latino/a El Pasoans:

I remember being in kindergarten when our principal Mr. Whitman told us that if we spoke Spanish we would be in trouble. . . . boy did I listen. I was afraid to speak Spanish and it was a bad thing at that time to speak Spanish. We looked



on to those who spoke only Spanish as the bad kids. And what made it worse is that we were separated into the English class and the Spanish class. So the Spanish kids didn't speak to us and vice versa.

Sadly, in El Paso as well as in the U.S-Mexico border states, such rules were in place, and oftentimes the consequences of breaking them were humiliation and expulsion. The principal and the school districts were involved in a negative “macro-tear” zone. While Natalia’s case is an example of a negative micro-tear zone, the number of Latinos/as in the border region with similar treatments is of epic proportions, especially when we consider 83% of El Paso is Latino and bilingual.

Her first gateway and sponsor experience on a typical computer was in middle school. Here she learned an older literacy, typing without looking at the keyboard, like many others of her *generación*. Her enjoyment from this experience stuck with her and as she went through school she took classes that allowed her to learn with them. Because of a misunderstanding she took a class in DECA (a business-marketing-entrepreneurial association) to learn more about computers; as she discovered, DECA was for job searching and not for learning computers at all. The following year she took two classes, BPA (Business Professionals of America) and FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America) “to kinda make up for the year I had lost.” While she was busy in school she still held a part-time job, working as an assistant to a career counselor at Riverside School. This position served as a cubbyhole gateway. It allowed her to use computers and apply what she was learning with real world applications, and to realize she could handle just about any task that came along.

Natalia is clearly a goal-oriented individual who has overcome some incredible odds, and the maturity she gained from her experiences has given her some insightful reflection into the economic divide that supplies more technology for those with more money. In this instance, it is her firsthand experience comparing two high schools as gateways:

I think the schools that could not or did not have a lot of money in their budget for reasons beyond anyone’s control suffered the most. Because I know that some high schools had more computers than others. For example when I went to visit Franklin High School my senior year I noticed that their library was full of brand-new computers. Riverside at that time had computers in classrooms but not in the library and there were about twenty computers in the library. WOW! So I guess if you have the money you have the resources that are out there but if you are struggling for the money it takes time to become one with everyone else. I



am sure that Riverside was not the only school left behind and I am sure that Franklin wasn't the only school with computers. All I can say is that it takes time to work your way up.

While not surprising at this point, Natalia knew that education was a key to a better future, and electronic literacies an economic motivator to help ensure this better future:

[My] motivation in school to learn computers is that I wanted a better life and figured that if I learned something that not everyone knew it would help me to get a better job and make more money. My motivation was to get out of my house and to do that I had to get a scholarship or grants or something to help pay my way through college. So when my sister left home I was thirteen years old and that was my motivation to do something with my life, besides marriage. The only real support I had was either by teachers or friends. . . . also, like I said before, one of my friend's mother was very supportive.

Conclusion

The psychology of the micro-tear zone and, whether positive or negative, its long-lasting effects has solidified this chapter. No matter what any of these participants' experiences with access were like, someone challenged them or nudged them to proceed. Sometimes that encouragement comes from within and manifests itself in motivation and a will to succeed, to follow a parent's or teacher's good example, or to go where no family member has gone. The ways that parents and teachers respond and react to learners can cause effects that motivate learners to push to learn more in positive ways. If the pushing is negative, it can cause either a withdrawal, creating low self-esteem, from the motivation to learn, or, as some participants have shown, it can push them to prove the person who had created the negative micro-tear zone wrong. While these participants appear to be both successful and well-balanced, I suspect that similar experiences have affected other learners in more severe, negative ways. By keeping the beneficial effects positive micro-tear zone experiences can create for young learners at the forefront, I believe we can create motivated, lifelong learners capable of adapting and embracing quick-paced electronic literacies.

The ways young participants get to a technology gateway in order to access and learn electronic literacies are becoming more and more important. Participants indicated that they typically needed to go to schools, libraries, and friends' homes to do their homework on computers. The importance of getting to one of these gateways is



paramount to students' success. While we hear of all the students who have technology, we need to pay more attention to those who do not. Yes, more technology gateways are available, but transport sponsors are needed to take them there; alternatively, students need people to bring them to gateways in order to complete work and learn. While it is a disadvantage not being able to afford technology, this divide is compounded when gateways outside the home are available, but students cannot get there, or they must constantly seek someone to bring them to a gateway.

This chapter begins with a saying familiar to the 1980s Saturday morning cartoon audience: Computers Are Coming Your Way! Participants in this chapter have certainly seen the prophecy fulfilled. While in earlier stages, computers were simply gateways that were supposed to do "something." Until they were paired with adequate sponsorship, computers remained a mystery of sorts. From these stories we can see that family backgrounds and sponsorship vary from person to person, but it becomes evident that exposure to computers is the first hook. In essence, gateways can be more or less static, but they are usually the places where access is opened, and through personal curiosity and sponsors this access is actually catalyzed and enabled.