

Generaciones' Narratives

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| SECTION | Chapter 5 |
| TITLE | <i>Generación</i> 1981-1985: Indirect and Direct Electronic Literacy Sponsorship, Cross-Border Gateways, and the Emergence of Technology Addictions |
| AUTHOR | John Scenters-Zapico |
| OVERVIEW | <p>Cultural ecologies on the U.S.-Mexico border, as we have seen in this area of El Paso and Juárez, have as many commonalities as differences among those who live here. The ways that participants in this chapter have lived their lives and struggled in the process is uplifting and discouraging. We will hear from voices who seem unaware of the hardships of “others” around them because of higher economic mobility, voices unaware of the difficulties of life in the U.S. and Mexico, and yet others whose experiences, like Gabriela Valdez, a native of Mexico studying in the U.S., that seem to be of both countries. This chapter explores a <i>generación</i> that was twenty to twenty-four years old at the time of participation and born at the explosion of the affordable home computer; it highlights participants who all have either finished high school or are actively pursuing an advanced degree.</p> <p>An important element that appears with all the <i>generaciones</i> is that traditional literacy experiences and successes foster stronger technological literacy experiences and expressions. As positive traditional literacy experiences serve as a catalyst for success in literate settings, so too has another trend come to light: Exposure to and use of technology appears to enhance participants' acceptance and willingness to learn new electronic literacies.</p> |
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***Generación* 1981-1985: Indirect and Direct Electronic Literacy Sponsorship, Cross-Border Gateways, and the Emergence of Technology Addictions**

John Scenters-Zapico

House Resolution 4437, called the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005, passed late Friday by a 239-182 vote. Included in the bill is a provision that changes a person's illegal presence in the United States from a civil offense to a felony . . . Among a number of sweeping changes to border and immigration policy, the bill calls for the construction of 700 miles of fence along the 1,300-mile U.S.-Mexico border, including one segment stretching from five miles west of the Columbus, NM, port of entry to ten miles east of El Paso (Meritz 1)



I have a friend that will tell you he swam across the Rio Grande River when he was about twelve years old just so that him and his family could have a better life with more opportunities. He graduated high school and is currently going to college. He told me that it is so sad how we take schooling for granted here in the States because he had to learn English when he was twelve by himself, and could speak better English than those students who were learning this language since they were

one. (Activate video for participant Gabriel Aragon's expanded commentary).



Today, if U.S. students cannot write to the screen—if they cannot design, author, analyze, and interpret materials on the Web and in other digital environments—they will have difficulty functioning effectively as literate human beings in a growing number of social spheres. Today, the ability to write well with computers and within digital environments—plays an enormous role in determining whether students can participate and succeed in the life of school, work, and community. (Selfe and Hawisher 2)

Cultural ecologies on the U.S.-Mexico border, as we have seen in this area of El Paso and Juárez, have as many commonalities as differences among those who live here. The ways that participants in this chapter have lived their lives and struggled in the process is uplifting and discouraging. We will hear from voices who seem unaware of the hardships of “others” around them because of higher economic mobility, voices unaware of the difficulties of life in the U.S. and Mexico, and yet others whose experiences, like Gabriela Valdez, a native of Mexico studying in the U.S., that seem to be of both countries. This chapter explores a *generación* that was twenty to twenty-four years old at the time of participation and born at the explosion of the affordable home computer; it highlights participants who all have either finished high school or are actively pursuing an advanced degree. Gabriel Aragon’s family stressed the importance of education because they realized its value from several perspectives. His aunt and uncle “knew how important an education was in the United States. My family would always say that we are lucky that we have free education and should take advantage of it.” At an even more personal level, Gabriel had a friend whose entire family crossed the border by swimming, and it was through this awareness that he began to “really appreciate the school system that we have.” Many crossers do not come to the U.S. for technology or traditional literacy. They cross the wet divide with the hopes of making some sort of income first. If the luxury of education comes with it, they feel fortunate.

An important element that appears with all the *generaciones* is that traditional literacy experiences and successes foster stronger technological literacy experiences and expressions. As positive traditional literacy experiences serve as a catalyst for success in literate settings, so too has another trend come to light: Exposure to and use of technology appears to enhance participants’ acceptance and willingness to learn new electronic literacies.

Despite the educational commonality, a clear cultural and economic difference exists among *participants* in this chapter. Take, for example, Gabriela Valdez, who expressed the mood of the Mexican economy she grew up with, which typically parallels the ebbs and tides of the United States’ and the close connection of economy to technology:



I was born in a time where technology changes daily. Technology is affecting tremendously our lives and the world itself. In every nation technology advancement is directly influenced by political and economic issues. Mexico is not the exception. In 1982, when I was born, President López Portillo was leaving office, and also leaving Mexico in a general climate of economic uncertainty. What became known as simply “the crisis” spread its bad economy effects through all economic spheres throughout Mexico.¹ Mexico, under Portillo, once again lost its faith in one of its leading political figures.

Many of the El Paso-born-and-raised participants in *Generaciones* cite as memorable events ones from other continents or out of their day-to-day lives, such as the Persian Gulf War and the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster. Yet as you read the participants' stories you will glimpse their families' experiences, successes, and hardships in life, while continuing the personal voyage into their real-life means of learning and practicing traditional and electronic literacies.

This last *generación* was born during the explosion of personal home computer sales. This is a time much like the Great American Land Grab of the 19th century: Land seemed cheap and ostensibly all could settle and use it for their own betterment, but like the Great American Land Grab, the Great Computer Grab of the 1980s was determined by access to money. Technology and land are similar: some get more, some less; some better parcels, some worse; some shared, some none. Participants' families have almost always shown a high value for technological education, supporting it in varying ways. The participants of this chapter represent a unique window, a *generación* born not before or after the massive computer personal and public gateway settlements. They were literally born on the range, in the moving wagons if you will, and grew up with technological difficulties and benefits as part of their whole cultural and intellectual landscape.

We continue to observe evolved notions from prior *generaciones*, yet in this chapter two significant electronic literacy occurrences appear. 1. Cross-Border Gateways: Up until this *generación* the learning of electronic literacies in schools has been sporadic. Now the learning is more integrated into classrooms and as the participants narrate, this is true on both sides of the border.² While several participants mentioned teacher-

¹ For more information, see “Mexico The Crisis Begins, 1982.”

² In 2007 I visited several special education schools in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua, Mexico, about a five-hour drive from El Paso and Juárez. While the schools had no air conditioning and were not fancy, they did have a nice array of computers, some old, some new. What I found most interesting was the level of

sponsors, the data on teacher-sponsors discussed in the conclusion shares a more nuanced view; 2. Technology Addiction: For the first time we hear a participant, Gabriel Aragon, suggest that his enthusiasm for technology has become an addiction, one his mother monitored closely because of some of the reports she had seen on TV. Parental monitoring of technology addiction and online dangers (such as predators) take on new roles.

Migrations from Mexico to U.S.

| Name | Birth | Place of Birth | Migration 1 | Migrations 2-4 | Current Residence |
|-------------------------|-------|----------------|------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| <i>Gabriela Valdez</i> | 1982 | Juárez, MX | El Paso, TX | | El Paso, TX |
| <i>Francisco Cossio</i> | 1982 | Juárez, MX | Nuevo Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, MX | El Paso, TX | El Paso, TX |
| <i>Elisa Alvarado</i> | 1982 | Juárez, MX | El Paso, TX | | El Paso, TX |

The participants of this migration and *generación* are unique in that Gabriela Valdez, Francisco Cosmo, and Elisa Alvarado were all born in 1982 in Mexico. While Gabriela and Elisa both moved to El Paso under different economic and educational circumstances, Francisco lived about five hours north in Nuevo Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, Mexico. He came to El Paso to study at UTEP but plans on returning to Nuevo Casas Grandes once he finishes his degree.

*Señora Gabriela Valdez*³ was born in Juárez and later moved to the U.S. to study at UTEP. Growing up in Juárez she described her home and family life in this way:

It is located in a country, it is big house, the color is green with beige, it has a three rooms, two bedrooms, one restroom, the dinner room, the kitchen [is one of the biggest rooms in the house], a room to wash dirty clothes, one garage with a space for two automobiles, one huge garden with a restroom and a room where my father have all there materials, a television room, and a living room. I used to spend the time in my room seen television, reading, studying, and talking by the

commitment to teaching and learning with them. Moreover, they used a lot of freeware, which they found from sources all over the world.

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



phone. At the beginning of the spring, my father used to invite people at the house and make the afternoons be out of a common and ordinary day. In the summer he loves to eat in the garden, so every body spent the time out there. Sometimes, I used to visit my mother in one of the rooms, were she made all kind of manual things. That's the way I used to spent the time in my house and when I'm there I like to be alone, meditate, think, and rest.

In her description, Gabriela created an inviting environment, one where support and socialization thrived all around her. Most of her early learning centered on direct sponsorship from her mother. When she was five or six years old, she “spent it reading, drawing, and make all kind of educational things. Every time that my mother take me of the book from my hands I cry, all the time was the same situation, and she always laugh about it because in a five-year [old] girl and it wasn't normal.” In elementary school she started studying English at one of the El Paso community colleges, but she was not able to continue because of her young age. EPCC serves as a language gateway for many because of its affordability and flexible times for courses. The role it serves in offering ESOL classes to Mexican immigrants is significant: “My entire friends used to came at school here in El Paso so, I always listening to them, but I was not competent to talk.”

Her reflections of the social and cultural shift taking place in this borderland can directly be attributed to the population explosion that came with the *maquiladoras*:

Mexico has been the country were my family born, my father came from the south of Mexico country so, they love to live in Juárez and by that time Juárez used to be a quiet and secure city. When I was a teenage girl my father used to let me go everywhere and they feel secure every time I go out with my friends and I remember how at that time, my father used to tell me stories about his childhood in the town where he came from and how different were the way to have fun at those times.

Her parents “love El Paso as well as Juárez,” and like many Juarenses “they like to come to El Paso and spend the day here shopping.” While we read of the vast sums of money that Mexicans send back to Mexico, the significant amounts that Mexicans spend in the U.S. are less frequently noted, especially in border communities like El Paso, where commerce thrives right across the bridge for Mexicans who come here to buy merchandise as varied as toilet paper to computers.



By this time, most of the female participants in *Generaciones* no longer worried if they could attend college. In Gabriela's instance, no gender barriers existed. When it came time to decide where to attend college, she was clear about her decision:

When I was deciding where to go to college I didn't think twice and I choose El Paso because they think that the opportunity to learn another language was going to be a benefit in the future for me and for the opportunities to get a job are going to increase because of the education that I will receive here in El Paso.

Once at college she experienced a micro-tear zone that turned out to be positive, but could easily have been negative:



When I start college I start writing, reading, and listening English and by the time my grammar is still terrible but I understand everything and that's a good thing. I remember once, that I started to take the English classes [in community college], we [a friend, my sister, and me] finished our assignments and we didn't know how to say "we finished," so we said "let just try [in Spanish]" and then we said "Ya fininshiamos." Everybody was laughing including us, that was funny but we learned that day how to say "we finish."

The story highlights a border that can understand English, Spanish, Spanglish, and other linguistic mixtures. While she reflected now on this story in an amusing way, many language learners are often too inhibited to say anything or, if they do, they remain intimidated or frustrated, avoiding future situations like the one she described. Experiences like this for many, I am certain, are a negative micro-tear zone. Teachers and employers could benefit by being aware of the way a MTZ could be positive for one student, yet devastating for another.

The complications, divides, and inequities between first and third world countries and how these play out in people's lives was an important theme for Gabriela. "Global changes," she reflected,

were affecting the entire civilization, poor countries, or countries in recession like Mexico at the time, could not enjoy most of these innovations. Lack of money restrained people from purchasing these articles, and inhibited technology investigations. Such was the case of the places where my parents were from, Jiquilpan, Michoacán, and Las Varas, Nayarit.



 Gabriela's mother, despite being unable to learn about technology, felt "si no fuera porque mis hijas están envueltas en la tecnología por sus estudios, jamás hubiera aprendido a utilizarla ya que de donde yo vengo todo es muy antiguo, y la poca tecnología que existe pocas personas pueden costearla o disfrutarla." On the contrary, her dad was reluctant to change his ways, even though he asserted that "La tecnología es algo que se ha convertido en parte esencial en la vida y es algo importantísimo para aprender para las nuevas generaciones, sin embargo soy ajeno al uso de ella." 

As an adult she is around computers every day at her job in an information systems department, which puts her in touch with the latest trends and developments in electronic literacies. Her specialization is in "application design, implementation and support in an ever-changing technology world of the PC." Her work experience informed her opinion that "young people more easily adapt to technology than older people do. And this is because newer programs in college and high school place computer learning as a primary goal of their academic programs." By any standard, Gabriela's electronic literacy is versatile and complex.

In my final interview with Gabriela, she noted that, "All though my parents have not involved themselves a lot in technology, they still think it is an important part of my studies, and have supported strongly my wanting of knowledge acquisition through out my life in school and college." Her parents' view has evolved and shows another angle to indirect electronic literacy sponsorship.


*Señor Francisco Cossio*⁴ was born in Juárez in 1982, but grew up in Nuevo Casas Grandes, Chihuahua, Mexico, about a five-hour drive from El Paso and Juárez. At the time of his interview he was living in El Paso attending UTEP but planned to return to Nuevo Casas Grandes when he finished his education. Often many bilingual graduates like Francisco end up staying in El Paso because they can make more money than they could in Mexico. Though these bilingual graduates could move to other parts of the U.S. and make even more money, they often remain in the area because they want to be near family and this rich bilingual-multicultural community.

Like other participants who studied in Mexico, their schools were not integrated by race but by economic class and, in Francisco's experience, by nationality. This created a nationality prejudice. Though Francisco is Mexican, his teacher and classmates separated themselves from the "others," who they saw as *americanos*, not *mejicanos*. He described these experiences in elementary school: "there were Mexicans,

⁴ A student in one of Scenters-Zapico's classes.



Americans (by the way, there were fights between Mexicans and Americans, and in sports, the teachers put always Americans against Mexicans).⁵ Tensions between cultures flow deeply here on the border, even though they have has a rich history together. We must recall that Americans studying in Juárez are from families whose parents were most likely born in Mexico. The children, who in turn studied in Mexico because their parents wanted to ensure that their children knew Spanish and Mexican culture, were, as Francisco highlights, segregated because they were part of the other culture, spoke its language, and were of perceived affluence.

Francisco's interview, more than any other, was imbued with the underpinnings of the border conflicts many face and grow accustomed to. Border crossings are always a risk, as he indicated: "The struggle is to take the computer you just have buy in the U.S. and take it to Mexico, without the soldiers taking it away from you, but it has never happen to me, they never do anything to us." Though he said he never had anything taken from him, all who cross the border know firsthand the Mexican "*mordida*." 

While Francisco grew up in a fatherless home, he had an aunt who became an important indirect sponsor. She bought him his first computer, a Compaq Pentium III, when he was seventeen years old and brought the computer to his home, creating a technology gateway. In this instance she became an indirect sponsor by purchasing the computer and by placing it in his home where he could have access to it without having to request permission to visit her home, yet she did not teach him how to use the computer or how to explore any new literacies with it.

Once the computer was in place, it created a vibrant gateway and multiple opportunities and forms of sponsorship among his friends and family. He clearly noted a difference between older and younger users' views toward technology:

They are learning, but the older they are the less they wish to know about them [computers]. My little cousins they teach me who to make some things, younger people are very skilled with computers now. A cousin I have he has thirteen and is the vocal of a rock band he created and he films there music videos with some level of effects, I mean, for his age, he is good.

In this compact narrative we can pull out the interrelationships and inter-generational sponsorships that technology has with his immediate family and friendship spheres. Obviously, this is a pattern with electronic literacies: Support and access go back and

⁵ The Americans at his school were Mexican-Americans.



forth across *generaciones* more freely than going across the wet divide. Francisco's closing comments on the role of technology in his life seem encapsulating: "They control everything now. From cars to heavy machinery. Security also depends in computers, space exploration and all that, so its very important."

Señora Elisa Alvarado was born in 1982, raised in Juárez, and now lives in El Paso as a student at UTEP majoring in social work. She came from a family with little money. Both of her parents have an elementary school education, possess no technical skills, and were unable to maintain a job:

We always live with a relative. We lived in an apartment complex with different rooms that housed all my aunts, uncles, and cousins. . . . It was a very small room the walls were already falling, and it did not have a door. It housed my parents, paternal grandparents, three younger siblings, and me. There was only one bed which would be occupied by my mother, me and my two younger siblings. My father and brother would sleep on the floor, and my grandpa and grandma would sleep outside. It was in the middle of downtown Juárez surrounded by bars and a lot of businesses.

Despite Elisa's poor living conditions, she had a wealthy social and educational sponsorship from her grandmother. The impact that educators can take from her experience is that, even if they have little in their teaching realms, they can still have an impact on students.

When Elisa was growing up, her grandmother served as a surrogate mother and role model:

When I was a child I wanted to be like my grandmother. She took care of me when my mom and dad were not their. Every morning we would wake up and she would dress me and comb my hair and make me breakfast and then we would walk to downtown and I remember seeing her talk to her friends that owned the little stores around the Mercado "supermarket." We would do this all morning and then at noon she would take me to a restaurant to eat some soup. As if we had no worries in the world. I think I enjoyed my grandmother's company because she was so friendly and talkative with her friends everyone in the "Mercado" enjoyed her company and they would ask her to come back.

These reflections reveal the young Elisa in a healthy relationship and world, one that offered her an alternative from the tumultuous one her parents provided.



At five Elisa's teacher exercised stick pedagogy on her, hitting her with a ruler because she could not read. Her mother responded by using the Juárez newspaper as a means for her to learn. In her educational experiences we can see some pivotal moments in how she would approach her later learning. What sounds like abuse in the U.S. was quite a motivator for her:

I remember once that I did not want to read and the teacher hit me in my hands with the ruler.⁶ I cried to my mother when I got home and she got "El Diario," the Juárez newspaper, and made me read it. I was five years old and she made me read a complicated reading to her. In three months I was reading all of the newspaper.

This was an amazing feat for Elisa. She experienced a destructive micro-tear zone at school, but her mother was able to turn this negative experience around and serve as a traditional literacy sponsor for Elisa.

Her life in Juárez was about to change when her parents separated. "That year⁷ my mom and dad got in a fight and we came to El Paso with my aunt. When my mother enrolled [me] to Zavala Elementary school I was placed in an all-Spanish class and was the best reading and writing student." This was a good time for her since she was able to excel in her Spanish classes in El Paso, which was wonderful for her self-esteem. Another change would affect her family life: Her mother was sent to jail for ten months. Elisa turned this into an opportunity by writing letters to her mother in jail: "I used to write letters to her everyday telling her about my life and about my younger siblings."

Like Luciá Durá in Chapter 4, she felt her teachers helped her balance her shattered home during this difficult period. It is no surprise that "at this age I wanted to be a teacher. Since I saw the teachers at school have such a great influence in the way I thought I wanted to have that same impact on others." Significant role models outside the norm were picked up first by her grandmother and later by teachers. This is heartening and important for family members and today's educators to realize: They impact young people's lives in oftentimes unnoticeable ways.

Elisa's first electronic gateway and direct teacher sponsorship occurred her freshman year in high school where she "learned how to use a computer besides typing. I was accepted into the magnet high school and was assigned homework that required

⁶ A clear micro-tear zone, both physical and psychological.

⁷ About age six.



computer use. I took a computer course and was taught how to use Word, the Internet and the basic computer terminology.” The times have certainly changed. While Elisa came from a poor and troubled family, early on her grandmother and then her teachers helped her with school and her developing self-esteem. While at the magnet school an anonymous donor gave her a computer: “It was very old, but it worked and I got all of my homework done. I think it only lasted about six months.” Through a seemingly innocuous gift, this indirect sponsor helped her develop and practice the electronic literacies she would need in school.

Her family members' use of technology ties into the evolved uses of computers in the home: “My siblings used computers for homework, entertainment purposes such as playing games, chatting, Internet use, email, pictures on the Internet.” Elisa was matter-of-fact when she talked about technology use in Mexico, specifically for those like her who grew up on the lower end of the socioeconomic scale. In schools, for example, she said that “I do not think that the instructors and administrators see computers as a necessity but a luxury. It is very difficult for a school to have a computer if their restrooms are in detrimental conditions, and their students could barely afford to pay for school and the books required.”

Her final reflections on electronic literacy tied closely to economics in Mexico. This is important to consider in the context of the participants' voices in this book, specifically those who live in Mexico. No matter what end of the socioeconomic spectrum, each feels the impact of a bad economy, but each laments it in different ways, and Elisa's perspective is from the poor side of the Mexican economy:

I believe that in Mexico it is a lot harder to obtain electronic literacy because of economic circumstances. People that work from paycheck to paycheck will not purchase a computer if they have no use for it. Here in the United States we have computer stores that will give you a computer based on credit that you can pay on a month to month basis. In Mexico I don't believe this program exists.

The thread she expressed throughout is that the most important divide occurs when there is no food on a family's table.

Migrations from the U.S. to Mexico

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Birth</u> | <u>Place of Birth</u> | <u>Migration 1</u> | <u>Migrations 2</u> | <u>Current Residence</u> |
|--------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Lizeth Sarto</i> | 1983 | El Paso, TX | Juárez, MX | El Paso, TX | Juárez, MX |
| <i>Michelle Elizondo</i> | 1982 | El Paso, TX | Juárez, MX | El Paso, TX | El Paso, TX |
| <i>Bernardo Rivera</i> | 1982 | El Paso, TX | Juárez, MX | El Paso, TX | El Paso, TX |

Señora Lizeth Sarto was born in 1983 in El Paso and is a student majoring in marketing at The University of Texas at El Paso. She is unique in that she grew up in Juárez, still lives there, and makes the now-trying commute to UTEP six to seven times a week. The home she grew up in and still lives in today is "small but comfortable with a little garden and a big backyard, with three bedrooms and a garage."

In Mexico in sixth grade Lizeth learned about computers to do exercises in a required computer class that met three days a week. At that time, "since it was kind of new, the use of modern computers, it was very interesting and I was willing to learn." Most of her teachers were untrained and unfamiliar with computers, but "they believed we should take advantage of the new technology that was coming out. . . . For them it is very important to implement the use of computers among students because they know that the 'world is computers.'" Strikingly her teachers' views and experiences toward technology in Mexico closely parallel U.S. teachers' experiences, even in 2008. More often than not, teachers just do not have the preparation and support to teach their students. These teachers serve in the role of indirect sponsors, when what should be available are direct sponsors capable of instructing both the use of the technologies and the communicative means they serve.

With only a middle school education, her parents knew the value of education, and invested in a computer to back up this deep-seated belief. Her father served as an indirect sponsor when he bought the family's first computer and created the family's first home gateway because he knew that Lizeth needed it for school assignments and to improve her computer skills. She was about eleven years old and recalled that it cost approximately \$2,000 and "was very expensive but my parents had the money to buy it. It did not cause a problem in our budget." The computer in the home, while bought to help Lizeth complete school work, became much more than a piece of technology to do schoolwork. As Lizeth pointed out, the whole family used it "to play, chat, communicate, and investigate." The role of the home computer as a multitasking instrument is undeniable.



Señora Michelle Elizondo was born in 1982 in El Paso, Texas, grew up in Juárez, and now lives in El Paso. She lived in her family's Juárez home for seventeen years:

A big house, it was in a city. It had a big patio, when you get in the home you would see the visitors room, at the right was a door that communicated this room to the living room, one of the walls was a mirror, this room had two windows. It had four rooms, for each member of the family. It was good. I liked a lot.

Michelle began learning English in high school. Up until this point she only spoke Spanish. To help accelerate the bilingual process her parents enrolled her in a language institute in Juárez. She and her family had set a goal for her to study at UTEP, so they knew learning English was imperative. On learning English, she felt that "at the beginning, it was kind of difficult but with the time I learned and then I got at UTEP and I had to speak, read, and write in English." Michelle was the first participant to mention that her parents wanted her to study in the U.S. to avoid the dangers of drug dealer violence. Bilingualism, from a cultural and academic perspective, I would argue, must have either an immediate or strongly perceived reason for the learner to immerse herself into another language. In Michelle's case, gender played no role in deciding if she went to college. She went to school in the U.S. because her "parents liked the education that Mexico offered but they did not liked the culture because there were a lot of *narcotráfico* [drug trafficking] and a lot of people were killed at that time." Many participants from Mexican border cities have valid fears of drug mafia and gang violence. On many border cities the drug violence has spilled into the U.S., with Laredo and Nuevo Laredo initially the most affected, but now Juárez and El Paso have the most violence because of this. Since January 2008 until December 2008, Juárez has had over 1,500 murders.

Michelle first learned to use computers when she was in a secondary school computer lab. There she had an influential teacher and direct sponsor, Dr. Diente,⁸ who "encouraged me and other students to start doing programs. At the beginning was kind of difficult but I could do it. I used to go to [computer] class every other day for two years and four hours each day."⁹ The computer lab in secondary school "was cool because I learned a lot of things like how to do programs with QBasic." From her intensive use of computers in school, her parents realized they needed to invest in this

⁸ Pseudonym

⁹ Author's note: I believe she means: "for two years, I used to go to [computer] class every other day for four hours each day."



technology as part of her education. In a joint and indirect sponsorship (that is, both parents selected the computer system), Michelle's parents created a home gateway when they bought the family's first computer in 1998 for their children's school needs.

Born in El Paso in 1982, *Señor Bernardo Rivera*¹⁰ grew up in Juárez, and now lives in El Paso. His memories of where he grew up hint at a higher socioeconomic class than some of the other participants in *Generaciones*:

The first one was my grandfathers, this was a very big house. It had room for twelve children and my grandparents. The house was very colonial in style and architecture. The main door was seven feet tall and eight feet wide, the door would open from the middle or you could open both doors to move in or out any big furniture items. It had three living rooms, a pool hall/bar area, four bedrooms as big as living rooms, and one master bedroom. This house was located in the Campestre Area of Juárez, where all the rich folks live. My grandfather was a very successful doctor in Mexico. He was a surgeon. So the house was in the city. The second house I lived in has much smaller, but still in a good area of town, actually it was fifteen minutes, walking distance, away from my grandfather's house. This is my parents home, it is a two story home, one living room, one dining room, and a kitchen. The second story is where the bedrooms are located. There are three bedrooms in the house, and there are two and a half restrooms.

His elementary school was "located in a central part of Juárez. It was huge! The school was built on many acres of land. It was two stories tall and had two classrooms for each grade. The school is cream colored with the shield of the school in the entrance." Compared to the participants in *Generaciones* who went to public school in Mexico and whose schools were unheated and in disrepair, Bernardo's private school was for a family of economic means.

Bernardo came from an upper-middle-class family from Mexico and attended private schools in Juárez.¹¹ Early exposure to technology can create a familiarity that enhances future electronic literacy experiences. Bernardo first came into contact with computers at an uncle's home; his uncle taught him to use the computer. The same uncle who acted first as a direct sponsor also indirectly sponsored him when he gave a

¹⁰ A student in one of Scenters-Zapico's classes.

¹¹ In Mexico it is generally accepted that there are two classes, very rich and very poor. Nevertheless, there is a middle class that could be considered like the U.S.'s upper middle class.



computer to Bernardo's family: "I came in contact with computers pretty early in my life, one of my uncles is very fond of them so when I visited his home I would get on his computer and paint pictures with the programs he had." His uncle, knowing Bernardo's interest in computers, created a home gateway when he gave a computer to the family: "It was a hand me down from my uncle that did not like it or use it any more. It was not sophisticated but it had a word processor, I think . . . I learned how to use a typewriter!"

Bernardo's early direct sponsorship and access to a computer, and then having his own, made the transition in school seamless. School became a significant gateway in his education,¹² and this brings to light two important points for this time. First, while he was only in middle school and in Mexico, the school had a computer class. Second, it is clear that because of more money, some private schools can offer more to students. At this time an important direct sponsor was his teacher, who "showed us the exciting world of DOS, and since I knew computers could be fun I already had motivation. . . . I probably had access to the computers for at least two times a week." Importantly, as he noted, his familiarity and motivation was already there. His uncle served as his first direct sponsor by teaching him electronic literacies at home, and served as an indirect sponsor by giving a computer to Bernardo's family. These experiences made the transition in his computer class less intimidating and even exciting. Bernardo's experience with technology was one of confidence and desire to apply and learn electronic literacy skills, one removed from the reaction that many first-time learners have in technology labs.

Bernardo's present outlook on technology is also optimistic and enthusiastic. His future electronic literacies are progressing in two directions: Communication and information access. The first was to communicate with family using email and other online tools, "since I am part of the National Guard¹³ and I have friends and family in many different places I see computers helping me keep in touch with my loved ones." The implication was that he would have gateways supplied by the National Guard and in his own home, wherever that might be. The other use of technology in his chosen profession is information access to data on patients. "Hopefully, once I am a physician computers will probably log as much patient information as possible." The belief here is that he would have a gateway at a hospital or clinic, that his staff would have the wherewithal to record such data, and that his patients would share it, or perhaps enter the data on their

¹² This setting is public in that the computers are for the students at his school. Though, admittedly, the school is private, but public schools and libraries are also private unless you attend or have the proper documentation to visit and use the facilities.

¹³ Author's note: In the U.S.



own. Enmeshed in his vision are several additional points. First, that Bernardo's work would provide him the technology and presumably the training for economic purposes, not altruistic reasons. Second, that the hospital staff would be equally prepared under the same premises, and third that patients would know how to enter such data. His optimistic vision is of an electronically literate workforce and general population.

El Paso Born and Raised

| <u>Name</u> | <u>Birth</u> | <u>Place of Birth</u> | <u>Migration 1</u> | <u>Migrations 2</u> | <u>Current Residence</u> |
|-------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Claudia Alvarado</i> | 1983 | Fabens, TX | | | Fabens, TX |
| <i>Gabriel Aragon</i> | 1983 | El Paso, TX | Socorro, NM | El Paso, TX | El Paso, TX |

The last two participants of literacy in *Generaciones*, Claudia Alvarado and Gabriel Aragon, were born and raised in the immediate El Paso area. They still reside and plan on remaining here.

*Señora Claudia Alvarado*¹⁴ was born in 1983, grew up and still lives in Fabens, Texas, about thirty minutes outside of El Paso. Fabens, like El Paso, is right on the Rio Grande, and has its own international bridge connecting it to Mexico. Claudia's family was financially comfortable, and like many on the border here, other family members played key roles in their upbringing: "Growing up I pretty much got everything that I wanted. I was very spoiled with my aunt and my paternal grandparents and they gave me everything that they could." At eight years old, a new sister came into the family "and things changed a bit. My mother stopped working and I wasn't as spoiled as before, but my parents still managed to give us everything that we needed."

Before her mother left the workforce her paternal grandparents and her aunt raised her "because both my parents worked. It was then that at a very young age, I learned to speak English and Spanish . . . at the same time." She was taught a lot by her aunt who "was like a mother to me who taught me the majority of the things I know." Having these Spanish speakers constantly around her played an important role in developing her bilingualism.

¹⁴ A student in one of Scenters-Zapico's classes.



Claudia's parents' literacies and education are common on the border. Her mother, who is bilingual and bicultural, "understands English but doesn't speak it. She only speaks Spanish." From a traditional view Claudia is first *generación* Latina in that her mother is from Mexico and went to school there, while her father went to a local U.S. high school, Fabens High School.

On the one hand, Claudia observed that "at home with my parents I never wrote," and she attributed this to the relationship she shared with her aunt and grandparents as her sponsors of traditional literacy, who were especially encouraging: "I loved to write her [her aunt] stories with pictures. I also always did my school work in her presence because she would help me." Fortunately, both parents stressed education to the family in various ways. Her mother regularly told her "that if you want to be successful in life, you must learn how to read," and her father would chime in that "without an education, life isn't worth much. People that don't know how to read and write will amount to nothing." Although her parents worked long hours, the direct and indirect messages were clear for Claudia: reading, writing, education.

Claudia's own literacy in Spanish and English is like that of many on the border who are born and raised in the U.S. Claudia stated succinctly what I have observed as common here: "While growing up, I learned to speak, read, and write in English, but only learned to speak in Spanish."¹⁵ In other words, many on the border speak Spanish from an oral tradition that inevitably ends up being an admixture of English as well, or what comes to be called Spanglish and border Spanish.

As she grew up the stigma she attributed to Spanglish, or *pocho* as it is called here, pushed her to welcome the opportunity to take Spanish classes in high school. The courses required reading and writing, and she felt she finally learned "how to properly write in Spanish." In her case, she studied the formal aspects of Spanish, which she felt enabled her to write properly. Nevertheless, she feels to this day more comfortable and confident with her literacy levels in English than in Spanish, despite using Spanish on a daily basis. The dynamic on the border creates an economic privileging for English. Spanish is used to communicate in oral contexts and many of the writings reflect this oral culture. The more "refined" literacy in Spanish comes from creative writers of poetry and fiction, though a significant component of this work uses and celebrates Spanglish.

¹⁵ Paul Kei Matsuda gave a talk at UTEP in 2007 and indicated his experience is similar: He speaks some Japanese, but his abilities with more advanced vocabulary and writing are limited.



Claudia had her first contact with computers in the fourth and fifth grades. Like many children of her *generación* on the border, she remembered her computer exposure and practices as spartan at the onset of computer integration.

We only had one computer in the class and we would always play a math game and the Oregon Trail. When we all finished our work we were allowed to use the computer. It was in fourth grade that I first learned how to use the computer. I sat down at the computer lab with my friend and together we managed to use the computer with the help of the teacher.

Her exposure to this technology gateway at this time was twofold. In the first instance, the direct sponsor was her teacher, the gateway was her classroom with the computer (used as a reward), and the software titles seem to have been used all over this area. In the second instance in fourth grade, she was allowed time in a school computer lab, and the teacher was again her direct sponsor. This is a remarkable snapshot of the ways that teachers introduced technology into their curriculum and how students experienced it. Sadly, this type of experience has not advanced much since this time and is commonly repeated today.

Outside of school Claudia had another electronic literacy sponsor, a friend who “already had a computer and encouraged us to use the computer. She would tell us how easy life was with her computer. I really loved computers as soon as I was exposed to them.” Like several participants noted, a congruency exists between outside “good” initial exposure to computers and then comfortable transitional receptivity to them in the classroom. As she progressed in school this love continued and she experimented with varying technologies in different setting and sponsors. For schoolwork, “I thought they were very easy to use and it saved a lot of time when it came down to typing assignments.” Yet her friends “thought that you could play really neat games on the computer and they all wanted to own one.” In these younger *generaciones* the melding of technology with work and “communication play” has already taken a foothold. Old communication technology also fuses with new in Claudia’s casual reflection: “As a teenager, I loved to chat online and on the phone.”

Like many parents who experience the demand of new literacies of technology her “family never imagined the importance of computers until today.” Her parents bought the family’s first computer when she was in seventh grade:

I remember going with them to go get it at CompUSA. It was an IBM Aptiva and it cost them about \$3,000 with a color printer. My parents didn’t have many bills to



pay at the time so it was affordable for them and they knew it would be important for me to use while I was in school.

This indirect sponsorship seems like a big investment then as much as now in an area where the average salary is significantly below the national average. For her parents to make such an investment, they knew the value of learning new literacies and invested wisely in them.

Claudia immediately used the new computer at her home gateway for typing assignments for school. Initially, they did not have Internet access at home so some of the ways she used the computer was for looking up information in the supplied CD encyclopedia, typing and printing assignments, and creating birthday cards. "When I first got my computer, I would use it day and night. It wasn't till about three years later that my family decided to get Internet access. After that, I would be on the computer day and night. It was like a whole new world opened before my eyes." It seems with or without Internet access she used the computer to access information, write, and create, yet the Internet appears to have opened her up to new ways to learn about the world and herself.

When her parents first purchased online access, she found the "computer was pretty slow and using the Internet was a hassle." At this point one of her former traditional literacy sponsors came back into play as an indirect sponsor, even though she was not literate electronically. Grandmother

knew how much my sister and I used the computer so she convinced my parents into buying me a new one. This computer was much cheaper than the first one we bought. It was about \$1,800 and the payments are reasonable. It is very affordable with the monthly payments. It wasn't a very serious investment for my family's budget because it affordable for my parents.

While her grandmother understood the need for the computer, it was her parents who bought and paid for the technology. Her grandmother and parents both became two important indirect sponsors.

In closing, Claudia characterized just how important technology is in her life:

Without computers we wouldn't have access to broaden our knowledge and enrich our lives with what the Web has to offer. We can now easily keep in touch with loved ones with the touch of a button making life easier for us. Everyone

should own a computer because they are taking over the world and sooner or later, nothing will be able to be accomplished without a computer.

Obviously, she is attuned to the role technology occupies in her life.

*Señor Gabriel Aragon*¹⁶ was born in El Paso in 1983 and grew up in the small town of Socorro, about a ten-minute drive from El Paso. He studied graphic design at UTEP and graduated in December 2008. The first place he lived was in a mobile home:

It was yellow and white. We had a huge back yard. I remember being little and thinking the back gate was about a mile from the house. We lived in the country. A few years later my father started building our house in front of the mobile home that we had. It took about seven months for them to finish and just like that they hauled away our small yellow mobile home. The new house was very big. It was two stories high with three bedrooms and two and half baths. I had my own room, as well as my sister, and we shared one bathroom.

He recalled that time in his life nostalgically, as the neighborhood was one “where kids could roam the streets without worrying parents.” The mobile home and the new home his father constructed were within walking distance of the elementary, middle, and high schools he attended. Socioeconomically, his family was well off because his “parents did not start their family until they were financially ready to have two kids,” and Gabriel did not remember lacking anything in life that was within reason. He added, “I do not recall a time where I overheard my parents argue about money.”

His mother was a traditional stay-at-home housewife, who served as an important traditional literacy sponsor, and her tireless efforts kept Gabriel on top of his education; even “during breaks between school years my mother would make sure that I did not get too lazy. She would either bring out the flash cards or have me read the newspaper or magazines.” (Activate video for Gabriel’s



¹⁶ A student in one of Scenters-Zapico’s classes.

expanded commentary). His mother was steeped in successful strategies for ensuring that her children had solid traditional literacy and work habits.

The first time Gabriel saw a computer he was ten years old:

I do remember the first computer that I saw was in fourth grade. It was a Macintosh Apple where the screen was just black and green letters. It was mainly for typing documents. It was the one that used the original 3½ floppy disks. . . . This is actually where I first played Oregon Trail. Computers were a big thing since they were just getting a bit more affordable. They motivated me just by telling me everything that it was capable of. I remember just sitting there in awe thinking of how amazing this machine was.

As the *Generaciones'* narratives have relayed, publicly accessible gateways, when available, have been powerful in equalizing technological experiences, especially in the U.S. We observe Gabriel, three years younger than Bernardo, who studied at a private school in Mexico. Gabriel's technology gateway was in a public school in the U.S. and afforded him opportunities Bernardo did not have even in private school.

Gabriel's father played an important indirect and direct sponsor role. He was a teacher at a local high school and because his job involved technology, he was able to bring home a computer and create a home gateway:

Since my father was into computer drafting at this time, he also brought home a Macintosh Apple computer that was a bit more modern than those in the schools. He always had the latest design because the school district always wanted him up to date. I remember I would use the Apple and it was finally in color. I used to love using Reader Rabbit on this computer.

Gabriel was able to practice at home what he learned at school because of the access his father had created. (Activate video for Gabriel's expanded commentary). In this instance his school's teachers and his father served as his first direct sponsors;





they taught him the electronic literacies that in turn gave him the knowledge base to break the rules at home and use his father's computer. Like Terry Quezada in Chapter 3, who kept her children off of her new computer, his mother was afraid he would break the computer:

I would turn it on and see where the buttons would take me. I was always discouraged by my mother to get on the computer only because she did not want me to break it and then they would have to pay for it. She would always tell me to wait for my father so that he could teach me.

His exposure to technological literacies is varied. His home was clearly a gateway, but a restrictive one. While his father was an indirect and direct electronic literacy sponsor, his mother served a prohibitive gatekeeper role. Despite the potential barriers, Gabriel learned enough about computers at school and was sufficiently motivated and electronically literate to break his mom's restrictions.

Gabriel shared a valuable firsthand, student-user view of what many early typical computer labs looked like. As educators we should keep in mind that we need to seek more input from students about their experiences in these settings in order to better create more user-friendly environments. It is time we recognize the physical, social, and psychological ramifications of our technological practices and become more like agents of adjustment:

Most computer classes had all the computers lined up against the wall and desks in the middle of the room when the computers were not in use. I don't recall if they always had windows but I know that they always had posters hanging on every inch of the wall.

Important in creating a home gateway, his uncle became an indirect sponsor by purchasing his first system in 2003 with Gabriel's input. In a turn of roles, Gabriel created a gateway at home and became a direct sponsor for his circle of friends and family. Most of his friends would visit his house to see and play the new games he had or have him teach them something they could not understand or something new he had learned. Gabriel, a self-starter and explorer, explained his perception of technology learning:

Personally for me it was not that difficult to be able to read or write in electronic environments. I think watching others use computers and experience them myself allowed me to easily handle computers. Going through school while the



computer era is at such a high has also helped me use many programs that I would never be able to use.

Gabriel's passion for technology and access at his home created a gateway for others and eventually placed him in the role of direct sponsor to his friends: "There were many times when my friends would come over to my house because I was one of the few kids that had a computer in my house. I talked to them about some of the games that I had and they were all very interested." In turn those same friends he directly sponsored



became direct sponsors to him when they "started teaching me new things. Sometimes we would even learn from each other or learn together." Throughout *Generaciones* we have seen the intergenerational influence ebb and tide from older to younger, and younger to older. His story illustrates a clear sideways flow among peer influences with the vicissitudes of sponsorships and gateways, and the odd ways they spring up, disappear, and are reinstated again. This story highlights the effect the economy can have, as well as the perception that sponsors have of

technological literacies. (Activate video for Gabriel's expanded commentary).

Later, when his parents divorced, his father left with his computer. This was a difficult period for him emotionally and technologically. His mother, who was instrumental in his traditional literacy learning, yet restrictive in his technological learning, now became an indirect sponsor for him:

When my father moved out he took the computer with him and I was in my last year of high school, about to move onto college. I knew that I was going to need a computer at home in order to make my life easier. I then asked my mother to buy me a Dell because I knew they had good computers and allowed monthly payments. I called the number and told them what I wanted, then passed my mother over to complete the sale. This was about three years ago and unfortunately I still have the same system.

This is the same individual who made sure her son completed his homework and that he studied during summer vacation, but who also wanted him off his father's computer.

Gabriel's experience with electronic literacy also brings up for the first time the notion of technological addiction. Gabriel's mother had to control this: "I would spend on the computer an average of about three to four hours a day." There were times, he says, that "I was chatting with anyone and everyone willing. There were times that my mom would literally have to scold me for being on the computer for so long. There were times when I was on the computer chatting until four in the morning. It is addicting and then I got into downloading with a dial-up, and this would take about forty minutes for one song." (Activate video for Gabriel's expanded commentary).



This direct sponsorship, though it can be restrictive, is an important new role for parental sponsors. Perhaps as educators we need to be sensitive to our students' destructive and addictive problems, the type of problem Gabriel self-professes. As educators and parents we need to intervene in effective, yet not restrictive, ways.

Conclusion

It is worth reflecting on the important role positive sponsors can play in a participant's life. Not only do they create access to people, such as family, friends, and schools, but they also serve to prepare participants for future encounters with technology. Instrumental in shaping how these more familiar technologies became used at school, home, and the workplace were the roles indirect and direct sponsors played in participants' learning. With most participants in this chapter we discovered the significance indirect electronic literacy sponsors have in either persuading someone like a parent to purchase a computer, unknown donors giving an old computer, a sister who buys peripheral technologies for her brother, etc., and we have to wonder if someone like Bernardo would have been so enthusiastic about DOS if he had not been allowed to use the computer at his uncle's. Direct electronic literacy sponsors, like teachers, have begun to make an impact in schools, suggesting more teachers are adequately trained and outfitted to teach new technological literacies.

Perhaps the most significant direct sponsorship to emerge occurred in three ways. First, as we have seen throughout *Generaciones*, a back-and-forth role between older *generaciones* and younger ones is beginning to appear. At first older individuals typically are indirect electronic literacy sponsors for their children, yet the children then become direct electronic literacy sponsors to their parents.

At times, the role then reverses, with each serving as direct electronic literacy sponsors, if the older adult became electronically literate. Second, we have the appearance of lateral sponsorship. Generally when participants know some electronic literacies and want to learn or refine another one, they are directly sponsored by peers. The roles shift among peers, and the more competent peers in a different literacy instruct the former. This dynamic is one of the most common I have observed by literacy of technology learners, yet the least understood.

Despite different economic classes, birthplaces, and life experiences, these participants highlight how technologies and the literacies that accompany them has become a part of all learners' lives. The type and level of literacies each was able to learn and practice was influenced by access and experience in and around technology. Obviously, economic class has much to do with the all-important familiarization of electronic literacies.

While Erika Mercado from Chapter 4 mentioned that she spent too much time online, especially shopping, which caused her to go in to debt, it is in Chapter 5 with Gabriel Aragon that we discover that the ever-increasing problem of technological addiction becomes more and more prevalent. Importantly, his mother had heard on the news about such issues and was proactive. As Gabriel stated, his mother always made sure the computer was in a public place in the household. This central area, part of Gabriel's micro-tear zone, is important when we consider the ever-growing dangers on the Internet, for children and adults alike.