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Transfronterizo Teachers of English in the Borderlands: Creating a *Mundo Zurdo*

Profesores/as de inglés transfronterizos/as en zonas fronterizas: creando un mundo zurdo

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Cross-border migration is increasing in a globalized world. On the physical borderlands, migration across and between borders occurs on a habitual basis. This qualitative study employs semi-structured interviews to explore how three *transfronterizo* teachers along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands draw on their backgrounds and lived experiences as they go about in their English teaching practices. Findings suggest that the diverse lived experiences of the three teachers allow them to develop a particular knowledge, consciousness, and agency in creating a third space, or a *mundo zurdo*, in which they advocate for their *transfronterizo* students.

Keywords: borderlands, *mundo zurdo*, *transfronterizo* teachers, transnationalism

La migración transfronteriza está incrementando en un mundo globalizado. En las zonas fronterizas físicas, la migración entre fronteras ocurre de manera habitual. Este estudio cualitativo emplea entrevistas semiestructuradas para explorar cómo tres profesores/as transfronterizos/as a lo largo de la zona fronteriza de Estados Unidos y México incorporan su pasado y sus vivencias al desempeñarse en sus prácticas docentes de inglés. Los resultados sugieren que las diversas vivencias de los tres profesores les permiten desarrollar conocimiento, conciencia y poder al crear un tercer espacio, o un "mundo zurdo", en el cual abogan por sus estudiantes transfronterizos/as.

Palabras clave: mundo zurdo, profesores/as transfronterizos/as, transnacionalismo, zonas fronterizas

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Introduction

The migration phenomena of families maintaining strong, ongoing ties to their homelands has been at the heart of the shared histories of Mexico and the United States due to the proximity of these two countries (Wyman, 1993). Even though the history of both Mexico and the neighboring United States share a difficult socio-political relationship, many have engaged in migration practices to and from either/both country(ies), many times on an ongoing, continuous basis.

This back-and-forth migration leads to transnational and *transfronterizo* migration practices. Transnationalism refers to "the dynamic instability of transformative transition that occurs when people and ideas from different parts of the world meet, cross-pollinating dimensions of thought and process" (Casinader, 2017, pp. 15–16). Hence, transnationalism "impacts individuals' ideas about who they are, the ways in which they construct knowledge and their understandings about what they can achieve personally, academically, and occupationally across cultural identities and spaces" (Mora Vázquez et al., 2018, p. 4).

The concept of *transfronterizo/a* was first coined by Ojeda (1994). Her study centered around how families and their members engaged in habitual border-crossings in the Tijuana-San Diego region of the U.S.-Mexico border, referring to these people as *transfronterizos/as*. Moreover, *transfronterizo* migration refers to continuous border-crossing experiences on a routine basis (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). For this study, I borrow the concept of *transfronterizo/a* from Relaño Pastor (2007) to refer to a person who engages in identity construction and reconstruction across two fluid worlds due to ongoing border-crossing experiences.

This research project aims to provide insights into how three *transnfronterizo* teachers understand and use their transnational backgrounds and understandings to foster a third space that embraces the experiences of students who, like them, engage in ongoing migration practices. By further understanding how *transfronterizo* English teachers recall their migration backgrounds in relation to their English teaching practices, this study aims to contribute to the broader educational research on transnational migration and education, particularly in fostering greater understanding of English teachers who engage in habitual border-crossings and decide to pursue English teaching. As such, this research will address a gap in the literature that focuses mostly on students and will, in turn, inform teaching practices and educational policies for both *transfronterizo* teachers and students mainly within the U.S.-Mexico borderland regions.

Background

Scholars have studied those who engage in transnational migration and who become educators (Menard-Warwick, 2008), particularly in the borderlands (Petrón, 2009; Petrón & Greybeck, 2014), highlighting the cultural and linguistic richness that they possess and apply to their teaching practices. Scholarship on this topic has expanded from the borderlands to the central part of Mexico due to the country's relatively large migrating population (Mora-Pablo & Basurto Santos, 2019; Mora-Pablo, Lengeling, & Basurto Santos, 2015; Mora-Pablo, Lengeling, & García-Ponce, 2019; Rivas Rivas, 2013). These works emphasize the teacher socialization process, as well as the challenges faced by transnational educators in the process of developing as educators.

While there is significant research on the transnational teacher socialization process, as well as transnational teacher experiences in terms of how they develop as professionals within academic settings in the borderlands and throughout Mexico, limited research exists on how *transfronterizo* teachers mediate their teaching practices through the lens of their migratory experiences (Brittain, 2002; Monzó & Rueda, 2003; Petrón, 2009; Weisman, 2001). This study explores the rich linguistic, social, and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that these teachers bring with them

into the classroom. As such, it is essential to explore further how *transfronterizo* teachers incorporate their migration backgrounds and practices to promote safe spaces for students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and advocate for *transfronterizo* students in classrooms in the borderlands.

Literature Review

Borderlands theory is at the core of this study. In her hallmark text, Anzaldúa (1987) viewed the borderlands as a third space and argued that they emerge when two or more cultures edge one another. For her, borderlands develop into a third space derived from "two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 25). As Romo (2016) further notes, "the borderlands of the U.S. Southwest, once territory of Mexico, and the northern Mexico states share a regional, economic, and cultural environment and a long history of movement of people, goods, and services across the border" (p. 8).

Borderlands also denote spaces where "multiple cultural identities are invented, and people slip into and out of them without being called upon to renounce their initial identifiers" (Wellman, 1996, p. 37). Moreover, Ernst-Slavit (2000) defines borderlands as "those unintentional, multicultural spaces where cultures meet" (p. 251), where those submerged in such spaces "discover similar shared beliefs and rituals and are able to construct new ones" (p. 251). In this sense, I conceptualize borderlands as third spaces that challenge the view of geopolitical divisions and argue that these spaces bring together languages, multiple cultures, and various cultural elements. Giroux (1988) has argued that our students may not only cross physical borders but also

> cultural borders historically constructed and socially organized within maps of rules and regulations that limit and enable particular identities, individual capacities, and social forms. In this case, students cross borders of meaning, maps of knowledge, social relations, and values increasingly being negotiated and rewritten as the codes and regulations that organize them become destabilized and reshaped. (p. 166)

In this sense, *transfronterizo* teachers and students continuously cross cultural, social, and intellectual borders to reconstruct their knowledge through their own educational practices. These unique ways of knowing emerge from navigating within multiple cultures and between Western and non-Western ways of knowing and can be referred to as border thinking (Mignolo, 2000). Thus, at its core, border thinking argues for overcoming the limitations of territorial thinking and challenging colonial ways of thinking (Mignolo, 2000).

Cervantes-Soon and Carrillo (2016) draw on the work of Garza (2007) and Giroux (1988, 1991) to conceptualize a pedagogy based on border thinking. They advocate for building on the subalternized knowledge of Latinx students by conceptualizing a decolonizing border pedagogy that centers teaching and learning as a practice of freedom. Border pedagogy serves as a counter-narrative stance towards unilateral or dualistic perspectives as it entails an understanding of one's personal existence "within social, political, and cultural boundaries that are both multiple and historical in nature and that place particular demands on a recognition and pedagogical appropriation of differences" (Giroux, 1988, p. 176). In doing so, educators may promote dialogue and reflection that allow students to critically examine the historically and socially constructed forms by which they live (Giroux, 1991). In this sense, border pedagogy may help both teachers and students to "critically deconstruct the narratives and languages that have shaped their histories and experiences" (Kazanjian, 2011, p. 373). In doing so, translanguaging may emerge. Translanguaging promotes processes of making meaning, shaping experiences, and gaining understandings and knowledge by drawing on multiple linguistic systems (Baker, 2017) through the flexible use of linguistic resources and features valued as a whole (Creese & Blackledge, 2015; García & Wei, 2014).

In this context of transnationalism and border pedagogy, the term *nepantla*, a Nahuatl origin word that roughly refers to "in the middle," can be used to account for the fluid nature of borderland transactions. *Nepantla* situates people and things within the borderlands, that is, within "a dynamic zone of mutual transaction, confluence, unstable and diffuse identity, and transformation" (Maffie, 2007, p. 16). *Nepantla* pedagogy places emphasis on social justice and human dignity (Reza-Lopez et al., 2014) and simultaneously "deconstructs and constructs our discourses as well as complicates our understandings of the world" (Abraham, 2014, p. 2). Moreover, *nepantla* pedagogy aims to allow educators and students to "see double"; that is, it "allows us to see the world through various perspectives searching for those ways of living that create and allow equality and freedom" (Abraham, 2014, p. 2). Jaramillo and McLaren (2008) further argue that a *nepantla* pedagogy leads learners into "knowing the way of historical contingency, a way of thinking about self and other and the relations between them through an analysis of the systems of mediation that sustain and reproduce them" (p. 198). *Nepantla* pedagogy develops as a space for the contestation of discourse to happen and urges teachers and students to bring social tensions forward, placing the students as mediators and questioners of these tensions as they actively contest the discourses they are presented with within the educational setting (Abraham, 2014). Furthermore, *nepantla* pedagogy offers the opportunity to signal uncertain terrains, crossings, shifting between multiple identities, and confronting and contesting power through agency development in everyday practices (Prieto & Villenas, 2012).

Lastly, Anzaldúa (1987) argues that those who cultivate a "tolerance for ambiguity" (p. 79) can create a third space, a liminal space that acts as a counter stance from the imposition of oppressive forces. This space is called *mundo zurdo* (left-handed world) and refers to a liminal space of transformation, a place, a world where people from disadvantaged backgrounds may come together, which accepts diversity, where difference is not discriminated but rather appreciated, and where the disadvantaged may unite in pursuit of transformation and creation of new stories to explain the world and one's participation in it (Anzaldúa, 1987). In other words, a *mundo zurdo* refers to the interwoven spaces of belonging for those from the margins (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008), which allows people from multiple backgrounds to build a new kind of belonging where they may fit together. To create a *mundo zurdo*, it is pertinent for people to raise a consciousness through living in various in-between worlds. Ultimately, a *mundo zurdo* allows people to move to "a more extensive level of agency" (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 2).

Method

The research question guiding this study is: How do *transfronterizo* teachers of English draw on their migration backgrounds and understandings to create a *mundo zurdo* in advocating for their *transfronterizo* students in classrooms in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands?

This interview-based study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative researchers "are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Thus, this study draws on a basic qualitative approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to understand the lived experiences of *transfronterizo* teachers and how their understandings impact their teaching practices. For such purposes, this research employs in-depth phenomenological interviews following Seidman's (2019) three-interview, life history approach. The interviews were conducted both face-to-face and virtually through Zoom.

An ethical code was created prior to the project to protect the integrity and identities of the participants and the researcher. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained prior to data collection. The participants were given a letter of informed consent under which they were informed of the purpose and scope of the project,

the possibility of publication, and a notice that their identity would be protected. The three participants were all assigned a corresponding pseudonym.

Through exploring the participants' life histories, the details of their lived experiences, and their reflections on the meaning of their lived experiences, I decided to develop vignettes of the three participants. The idea of crafting a vignette for the participant emerges from Terkel (1974) and is further elaborated by Seidman (2019). Crafting a vignette based on the participants' experiences "is an effective way of sharing interview data and opening up one's interview material to analysis and interpretation" (Terkel, 1974, p. 128). Thus, a vignette seeks to display coherence in the constitutive events of the participant's experiences (Locke et al., 2004) by bringing an aesthetic component into reporting the data to make the researchers' and readers' work enriching, pleasing, and humanizing (Garman, 1994).

Context and Participants

This research project was carried out at a large public university in the borderlands of the Southwest of the United States. The participants, three *transfronterizo* teachers, were pursuing doctoral degrees at the time I interviewed them. All of them were earning doctorates in education, in a program particularly related to the interrelationships between teaching, learning, and culture.

The participants were two women and one man between 36 and 48 years old. They were all born in Mexico and engaged in ongoing migration practices at different stages in their lives. Throughout their lives and migration practices, they developed a unique consciousness, which allowed them to better understand and advocate for students who, like them, have engaged in or currently engage in *transfronterizo* migration practices. The participants all faced challenges in adapting to the host setting and culture. One of the main reasons they applied to this doctoral program was its focus on the interconnectedness among teaching, learning, and culture. They all desired to grow further as teachers and researchers in this border context and to develop greater agency in advocating for *transfronterizo* students.

Findings and Analysis

In this section, I present and analyze the vignettes of the three participants.

Rosa: The Border Is "Something That I Didn't Understand Its Importance Until I Crossed"

Rosa is a woman of 38 years of age. Born in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico, she has lived there all her life. Her family roots are from the central Mexican state of Aguascalientes. She comes from a nuclear family of eight siblings, along with her mother and father.

Her schooling was predominantly in the Mexican public education system, with a few years spent in a religious institute while completing high school. In her undergraduate degree, she minored in literature and majored in journalism, which quickly inclined her to work as a reporter for some newspapers. It was not until the profound cartel violence in Ciudad Juarez intensified in 2009 that Rosa decided to move toward teaching and away from journalism due to the violence against journalists. Her initial teaching experiences were within the public technological baccalaureate system, allowing her to teach reading and writing courses related to her undergraduate degree. Rosa was offered a position in public education teaching English at the high school level. She recalled the daunting and bureaucratic experience of obtaining a formal English teaching certification required by the state Ministry of Education. Nonetheless, she felt encouraged to go through the formal process of obtaining her English teaching certification. She considered herself to be "a person who has been lucky." She explained this was "because all my jobs and all my fellowships have been granted without the help of others."

She also expressed joy at being one of the founding teachers of a new technological high school, where she grew as a teacher. She reminisced about the process of founding this high school. She referred to the setting as "one of the most stigmatized zones in Mexico . . . a zone with many stereotypes, very stigmatized, a poor neighborhood." The particular zone in which the new school was to be built was also continuously put in the media spotlight, as it was the location in which many murdered bodies of women were found in the 1990s. This phenomenon was due to the increase of femicides occurring throughout Ciudad Juarez because of cartel-related violence and conflicts. Despite the stigma and negative views about this neighborhood, Rosa accepted the position as an English teacher. To her surprise, the school began operating within a few weeks, and she and the other teachers were tasked with recruiting and registering students for the upcoming school year. They had been loaned the facilities of a kindergarten in the neighborhood so that they could teach high school classes while the new building was being constructed.

It was this initial teaching experience that encouraged Rosa to pursue a master's degree in Applied Educational Research also in Ciudad Juarez. Soon, she was teaching reading and writing in English at the undergraduate level at the same university. Her enjoyment for teaching grew more from this new teaching opportunity. This experience helped her contrast both educational settings: working in a marginalized community as well as in a more privileged sector of society. With regards to working in the stigmatized community, Rosa recalled that there were "life lessons" in acknowledging her students' harsh realities, seeking to "maintain the student engaged in the class" and avoiding increased dropout rates. She encouraged her students to "value school as an investment," aside from dealing with poverty, ruptured families, and many other potential barriers. Moreover, she highlighted the importance of being solidary with the community. She discussed the high pregnancy rates at the high school, along with the fact that teachers celebrated these young mothers-to-be by throwing baby showers for them.

Along with her teaching experiences, Rosa also commented on becoming aware of *transfronterizo* students and the English proficiency and linguistic capital they brought into the English-learning classroom in Mexico. In promoting linguistic diversity within the classroom, Rosa recalled several students who, in most cases, were born in the United States and were taken by their families to Ciudad Juarez at an early age. She expressed her support in allowing the students to improve further their English proficiency and assigning tasks that were different from traditional English assignments in Mexico. She recalled encouraging students to bring in content related to their interests and simply engage in informal talks around various topics. Furthermore, she recalled the case of one student of Indigenous descent who enrolled in her high school and who was in the process of learning Spanish as a second language. She recalled how the school community supported this student in acculturating to the "Juarense" community while also acquiring greater proficiency in Spanish.

Rosa also discussed the migration phenomenon and its impacts on youth ideologies, specifically those who wanted to be "*mojados*"—those who want to migrate to the United States without authorization in order to work and fulfill the "American Dream." She saw this as being influenced by the fact that many migrants visit their homes back in Mexico during summer and/or winter breaks. She noted that among teens, "there are very few who reflect on the experiences of aggressions, racism, low-paid jobs, the risks." As for her students, this seemed to reflect a rather "normal" expectation to encounter when arriving in "*el norte*." She also believed that people who seek to cross the border without legal documents are uninformed about the extremes of living in such geographic spaces, where so many border crossers perish in the excruciating temperatures of the desert. She also noted that narco-culture has a profound impact

on youth, particularly those who take part in drug trafficking. This was especially the case in stigmatized and marginalized sectors of society, where youth are already portrayed through negative ideologies and seen as "others."

With regard to her own migration experiences, Rosa reminisced about engaging in migration practices in her mid-20s. She noted that her awareness shifted once she was "crossing the bridge" into a new and different country. She referred to this process as "something that I didn't understand its importance until I crossed." She explained this by talking about the many uncertainties of crossing, such as being late to class and being pulled aside by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agents for extensive questioning about her intentions in the United States. She commented "I ended up knowing it's luck, depending on the mind state of the CBP officer." Despite these issues, she still viewed the opportunity to cross the bridge continuously as a privilege. This, in turn, helped her build empathy for students who also engage in ongoing border-crossing experiences. She acknowledged "the sacrifices they make to wake up early . . . and the stress that is generated by not knowing whether you'll arrive on time . . . battling with the bridge."

Rosa is pursuing her doctorate in Education at a public university located in the borderlands in the southwestern United States. In looking ahead at her future academic endeavors, Rosa acknowledged the worth of the doctoral education she has received thus far. In the courses she plans to teach in the near future, she intends to ask about the students' home languages and cultural backgrounds. She understood how important it is to appreciate the assets that each student brings into the classroom. This allowed her to gain greater consciousness about challenging the negative perspectives towards marginalized populations and, in turn, develop agency in providing accommodations and a safe space for her students to resist negative discourses and build on each other's experiences as they seek to grow personally and academically within the educational setting.

Gerardo: "Being Able to Transmit That Culture, a Shared Knowledge… Is Uniting Us, Creating a New Culture"

Gerardo is a 36-year-old man who was also born in Ciudad Juarez. His father moved to Ciudad Juarez from a rural community in Durango, Mexico at the age of 16. In search of economic opportunities to provide for his siblings, Gerardo's father met his mother in Ciudad Juarez, and soon, the two decided to form a new family.

Gerardo's formal education had been in the Mexican public education system until his doctoral study in the United States. His awareness of the English language began at an early age, as he watched the English channels on public television in Ciudad Juarez throughout his childhood. In his teenage years, he came to understand more about the closeness of Ciudad Juarez to the neighboring United States. He recalled many Americans coming to visit his hometown, and shopping for local goods. He talked about continuously being reminded that "as you grow up, you *had* to learn English." He became aware of the particular languaging practices he witnessed throughout his border community. He explained that people "speaking *pocho*, speaking words between both Spanish and English," was common. Gerardo also acknowledged the cultural intertwining between the neighboring Ciudad Juarez and El Paso, Texas, as many "American" festivities and holidays were also celebrated throughout his border community. He recalled, for instance, a greater tendency to celebrate Halloween in Ciudad Juarez, over the traditional Mexican "*Día de los Muertos*," as well as the adoption of Thanksgiving into many *Juarense* families.

Gerardo pursued an undergraduate degree in tourism, and near the end of his studies, he was offered a job teaching at a local high school in Ciudad Juarez. Gerardo developed a delight for teaching, so he decided to pursue a graduate degree in English Language Teaching upon completing his bachelor's degree. Simultaneously, Gerardo decided to enroll in formal English instruction,

completing a total of 11 courses. This pushed him to pursue a master's degree in the field of education. Soon, Gerardo had earned a fellowship that would cover the expenses of an English-teaching certification if he agreed to teach English at the pre-K level, where there was a great need. While teaching English at the pre-K level, he began to offer private one-on-one English courses to teens and young adults. Soon, he was offered a position teaching English at a public high school. Gerardo felt confident about his English teaching skills, noting that "the advantage I saw was that I myself was an English learner." Based on his own process of learning English, he developed knowledge of what was needed to learn English in the borderland region and a compelling English curriculum. In reflecting on his initial teaching experiences, he noted that he began teaching so that he would also continue learning. He also noted the importance given to productive skills (i.e., speaking and writing) as opposed to receptive skills (i.e., listening and reading), as he was aware that many students intended to cross into the United States and were likely to engage in oral exchanges and communication.

He further emphasized the richness that *transfronterizo* students brought into the classroom and encouraged greater discussion and engagement among the students in conversing and discussing content matters with one another. This derived from a common ideology adopted by many of his students who sought to learn English and improve their proficiency in the language, with the belief that high proficiency in English was essential to finding work in the neighboring United States. He thought that his varied teaching experience—from pre-K to higher education—had enriched his awareness of interacting with his students and continuing to develop his teaching practices.

These experiences led Gerardo to pursue his doctoral degree, where he is exploring the English teaching practices and experiences of non-native English speakers in El Paso, Texas. Interestingly, it was not until the early 2000s that Gerardo engaged in border-crossing experiences himself. It was during his early twenties that he recalled "crossing" to go shopping and for vacations. These crossings were rather sporadic for him until a few years ago, when he began to engage in continuous border-crossing, as well as with the paperwork that is required to enter the United States while studying for his doctorate. He also gained awareness of the requirements for working on both sides of the border, noting the certifications required for teaching in the United States, in contrast with the more accessible work contracts available in public schools in Mexico.

Gerardo discussed feeling out of place in the United States and being exposed to varieties of English that "diverge from that of the textbook," as in the case of informal greetings not always based solely on the script outlined in textbooks. Taking doctoral courses entirely in English represented a challenge. With regard to the distinctiveness of the borderlands, Gerardo became aware of the predominantly Hispanic population. He highlighted that "there are many Hispanics, many Mexican-origin youth, whose parents are Mexican . . . being able to transmit that culture, a shared knowledge . . . is uniting us, creating a new culture."

Pamela: "I Wanted My Students to Have a Different Experience From What I Had, at Least When They Were in My Class"

Pamela is a 48-year-old woman who was born in Muñoz, Durango, Mexico, where she spent her childhood with her family. It was around the age of 12 that she and her family moved to Parral, Chihuahua, and ultimately to Ciudad Juarez when she was around the age of 15. Soon, she moved to El Paso, Texas, where she enrolled in high school. That was when she began to engage in continuous border-crossing experiences.

She discussed the reality of culture shock, as she felt everything was "so different" on the U.S. side of the border. Once in the United States, she felt unfamiliar with how things worked and unmoored in her big,

new school. All of this caused her to feel out of place. Those complexities intensified when she began moving continuously between El Paso, Texas, and Tucson, Arizona. She recalled the unpleasant experiences of having to move again and again. She explained that she "didn't feel like [she was] at home" anywhere. She stated, "every day was such a struggle for me to get up and go to school." What Pamela did to acculturate was to gather with friends from similar backgrounds. She identified classmates who shared similar translanguaging practices and was drawn to them. This allowed her to feel comfortable in using English and gradually learn more English from her friends.

Pamela reconstructed her identity throughout her migration practices, understanding that she was trying to find a sense of belonging. She noted that these experiences made her "realize the importance of family and feeling like you belong . . . your culture, your identity, knowing there's a place where you belong or where you can say 'this is home.'"

Because of the challenges she encountered as a *transfronteriza* student, Pamela aspired to become an understanding teacher for other border-crossing students. She explained that "being in a new environment and feeling lost and not belonging" as a student in the U.S. educational system was a profound identity experience for her. Early on, she realized that she wanted to become a bilingual teacher. She recalled, "I wanted my students to have a different experience from what I had, at least when they were in my class . . . that stayed with me because…I still remember how I felt." Pamela acknowledged that these difficult experiences have helped her relate to her students and build rapport with her *transfronterizo* learners.

Continually referring to her own linguistic skills, she highlighted the necessity of not mixing Spanish and English while visiting her hometown in Durango, where this was seen as a sort of betrayal of the home culture. In contrast, translanguaging practices were more commonly implemented on the borderlands. Thus, she noted that language mixing in central Mexico could lead to prejudice or negative labeling, partly because she is perceived as having an "accent" in Spanish when she visits. She still thinks of herself as in the process of learning English. Interestingly, it is also due to her proficiency in the English language that she felt "uncomfortable and out of place" on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. That is, she felt insecure about her accent and speaking in both Spanish and English, but that insecurity was pronounced when using English in the United States. Despite being in a borderland community "where a lot of people speak both [English and Spanish] or have an accent, and it's not necessarily frowned upon," Pamela still admitted to feeling insecure about her linguistic proficiency in both languages.

This, in turn, led Pamela to pursue a graduate degree in bilingual education. She explained that she had always taught bilingual students and had supported them along the transitional program, which sought to quickly place students in English-only instruction along with their basic education. She recalled the pressure of having the students test in English as early as possible, yet she would advocate for those who "were not ready" to test only in this language. She developed agency in suggesting alternative, formative assessments, which helped highlight the bilingual assets of the students rather than conforming to monolingual perspectives.

With regard to recognizing *transfronterizo* students, she noted that "we [the United States and Mexico] share students . . . we have a lot of families whose kids come here [to El Paso] to school. Then they have to go back [to Ciudad Juarez]." She noted that aside from building stronger relationships with her students due to the many similarities she has with them, these students also helped her know where they came from, which further reinforced their identities. She stressed the importance of promoting bilingualism and aiming for her students to value their language, roots, communities, families, and, ultimately, complex identities. She placed emphasis on being intentional

in implementing translanguaging practices among her bilingual students and allowing them to make use of their entire linguistic repertoire by not adhering solely to the English language but rather by honoring their heritage and referring to their home language as needed. Furthermore, she discussed allowing students to rely on translanguaging in completing their class assignments.

Pamela is completing her doctoral studies and working with preservice teachers in an undergraduate bilingual education program in the United States. She noted the importance of understanding her students' experiences, especially those who "cross" continuously or daily. She acknowledged the complexities and uncertainties of doing so and the challenges that arise as Mexican-citizen preservice teachers reach their professional practices. She seeks to promote both the many assets that bilingual teachers may have within the educational field and an understanding space in which she assigns alternatives to assignments where students cannot physically travel to a school district to carry out their preservice practices.

Discussion

From living the uncertainty of "crossing" on an ongoing basis to gaining familiarity with the cultural and linguistic practices on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border to acknowledging students who shared similar lived experiences, the three *transfronterizo* educators developed agency in maneuvering their way through borderland societies.

Mora Vázquez et al. (2018) argue that transnationalism encompasses an array of factors (i.e., sociocultural transitions, identity [re]construction, agency development) and ultimately leads to particular social, cultural, and professional engagement. These ongoing migration practices act as an internal influence of a state of mind that favors the preservation of connections across national borders (Mora Vázquez et al., 2018). Additionally, transnationalism is crucial in how people reconstruct their ideas about who they are in their various facets (i.e., personal, academic, professional) across different spaces and with different people (Casinader, 2017).

Thus, the answer to the question of how *transfronterizo* teachers of English draw on their migration backgrounds and understandings to create a *mundo zurdo* in advocating for their *transfronterizo* students in classrooms along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands may lie in the unique experiences that each participant has engaged in. As a result, these educators have gained knowledge, skillsets, and a nuanced consciousness that allows them to better understand and navigate the life of the border. Consequently, these teachers become activists for their students as they promote a safe space in their classrooms, while many of these students confront the myriad of uncertainties of crossing the border as they strive to cope with an unfamiliar and unsympathetic school system on "the other side."

Conclusion

The findings of this study depict how *transfronterizo* teachers of English draw on various experiences (i.e., personal, educational, professional) to advance their understandings of their transnational backgrounds, [re]construct their identities, and ultimately establish greater empathy with those students who, like them, have engaged in continuous border-crossing experiences. Each of their stories is quite unique and helps illustrate the complex raising of a consciousness derived from navigating among and between geopolitical borders. In doing so, they help foster a third space, a *mundo zurdo* where the disadvantaged, marginalized, and/or oppressed students may come together for greater social and educational change and well-being. This points to the many assets that *transfronterizo* teachers bring into the educational setting, as well as the cultural and linguistic understandings and resources which are emphasized and shared with their students.

Implications

First, it is imperative to place greater attention to the experiences and worldviews that transnational and *transfronterizo* teachers bring into the educational setting. Not only may these help promote a better transition for students along the borderlands in the United States, but also within extended settings and locales in both the United States and Mexico. Acknowledging and appreciating these experiences and worldviews helps counter subtractive educational practices (Valenzuela, 1999), as well as minoritized (García & Solorza, 2020) and/or deficit lenses in order to promote an assets-based perspective when acknowledging and incorporating children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds into the classroom.

Second, this project helps inform teacher education programs of the new transnational reality and the potential knowledge and/or training teachers may require. Thus, both preservice and in-service teachers on both sides of the border should be prepared for our transnational present and future and informed about how to better incorporate the students we share (Gándara & Jensen, 2021). It becomes crucial, then, to acknowledge the lived experiences of transnationals on both sides of the border and recognize them to be both "from here and from there" (Kasun & Mora-Pablo, 2022) as co-existing among multiple forms of identity.

Further research calls for a more in-depth analysis of the teaching practices that these *transfronterizo* teachers engage in. A better understanding of their linguistic and cultural practices may help them comprehend how solidarity is built with their students in seeking greater cultural awareness towards the target culture. Reflexive teaching practices may add a layer of analysis to the aforementioned endeavors.

Additionally, further research may adopt a comparative approach to compare and contrast the practices of transnational and *transfronterizo* teachers on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Doing so may build better relationships between both educational systems and ultimately help better integrate both immigrant and ongoing migration students into both educational systems.

This research project centered on the migration backgrounds, experiences, and understandings that *transfronterizo* teachers draw on to create a *mundo zurdo* in acknowledging and advocating for students who share similar ongoing migration practices. As noted, each participant gained a particular consciousness from their lived experiences. This allowed the promotion of a safe space for student support in navigating oppressive discourses as they maneuver among and beyond the borderlands.

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