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TRANSNATIONALISM AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC:
THE EFFECT ON STUDENT IDENTITY AND ACHIEVEMENT

by

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TRANSNATIONALISM AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
THE EFFECT ON STUDENT IDENTITY AND ACHIEVEMENT

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As transnational movement between the Dominican Republic and United States continues into a new generation, it is important to understand how such movement affects the lives of transnational youth. Unlike adults who choose to move transnationally for a variety of reasons (many times in economic risk-reduction) youth rarely have the power to determine their transnational reality, rather, the adults in their lives choose it for them. Regardless of who controls the power of decision, transnational movement has a great effect on youth especially in their formation of identities and their academic experiences. The following study, which includes an overview of the field of transnationalism, I examine the effect transnationalism has on the lives of four Dominican case-study participants who were also my former students. Through their stories (and my teacher-reflections) I provide evidence that further research on multi-generational transnationalism is necessary, especially to understand and address the complex needs these transnational students have in classrooms in both the sending and receiving countries.

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I recently returned from a trip back to the Dominican Republic. On my way to the island, on a flight from San Juan [Puerto Rico] to Santiago, I sat next to a man who was making his first trip back to the island in six years. He was dressed impeccably in dress pants, polished shoes, and a cotton dress shirt. He lifted a carryon above my head and I ducked as I realized how heavy his bag must be to cause him to strain so to lift it. He stuffed a bulging K-mart bag filled with new clothing, tags sticking out, under his seat and then he strained to look out the window. During the 90-minute flight the attendant came around to pass out immigration forms; I dug through my bag, retrieved my passport and a pen and began filling in the blanks. My seat-mate watched me for a couple of minutes and just when I assumed he would ask to borrow my pen, he petitioned something else instead. "Could you fill out my form? My passport is here," he offered, placing form and passport on my fold-down table; my Dominican transnational seat-mate was apparently illiterate (in either Spanish or English).

I have encountered countless individuals with a transnational story in my years on the island and travelling to and from. The number of transnationals I have encountered in Nebraska is smaller, but there is a presence there too. Each story captivates me. I have been overwhelmed at the broad scope of transnational life that happens between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic. My own personal history with the Dominican Republic places within me a deep interest in these transnational stories and what they mean. My background is in education, and so of course, my questions circle around how students' transnational stories have shaped their educational experiences and identities and in turn how their identities and educational experiences share their engagement with the world in

two or more countries. I too have lived transnationally and have been involved in schools in more than one country and language and I understand that my own connection to “my island” has profoundly shaped my own identity and life’s choices. This thesis then, though mainly about adolescent students who live in or between both the United States and the Dominican Republic, is also about my identity and life choices. I know these students as a researcher and author (here), but also I knew them as their teacher. I interacted with them in the Dominican Republic, but part of our interactions was about the United States in the obvious sense that I taught English, but myriad of other ways too.

From My Transnationalism to Theirs:

(1986) I walked down the narrow airplane corridor, notebook in hand, backpack securely strapped over my tiny shoulders, and stepped carefully down the steps to the tarmac. The humidity hit like the waves I could hear crashing from the end of the runway. Tall palm trees swayed above me and I inched closer to my mom as airport personnel herded us past armed guards into the custom’s area. I was seven and my family had just arrived in the Dominican Republic. My eyes must have been the size of saucers; in my mother’s version of the story, she claims that in that moment, she knew that my life had changed forever.

The purpose of our two-week trip was to spend some time with my mother’s sister who had been teaching on the island for a year. As a first-grader at the time, I joined my Aunt’s second-grade class in Santiago for a week. I ate *jamon y queso* sandwiches from Santo’s shack in the middle of the school courtyard, and played at recess with my new

friend Claudia. I rode on the back of my Aunt's motorcycle to the small supermarket, drank Coke through a straw from a cold glass bottle, and ate my fill of *la bandera* (beans and rice). I spent my meager savings on a polished conch shell and saved a one-peso bill in my spiral notebook as a souvenir. I made the trip from Santiago to Santo Domingo, visited the Cathedral, where Columbus's mausoleum remained (before it was moved to the Faro a Colón in 1992), and drank *pina coladas sin alcohol* across from the grounds of the National Palace.

We traversed the island, crossed over mountains, and watched the island's coastline stretch out before us. I spent a morning in the market buying fresh fruit, and the afternoon at the beach, marveling at the schools of colorful fish and choking on mouthfuls of salt water before acquiring snorkeling skills. My brother built sand castles with a couple of Dominican boys on the nearly vacant beach, and my great grandmother napped in the shade with a wide straw hat covering her eyes. While staying at a small beach bungalow, I read my chapter book by candlelight when the power went out—*se fue la luz*— and fell asleep to the sound of the waves caressing the golden sands of Sosua.

As for my mother's premonition about me, my family made return trips to the Dominican Republic throughout my childhood and high school years. Although my aunt had returned to the United States, my parents had established a community of friendships through the school where she had worked. Each time our plane landed, I felt the companionship of my first-grade self, clinging as closely as the tropical breeze enveloping me. While I am inescapably 'from the U.S.', my experiences on the island

changed me. I fell in love with Dominican culture, its music, its food, its language, and the warmth of its people. I felt nearly as at home on that stretch of coastline, as I did in the middle of the green fields of Nebraska under a cloudless summer sky. With each departure from the island, I'd watch its coastline slip away, swallowed by endless blue and wish for my next return.

When I completed my undergraduate education and my semester of student teaching, I was impatient for a classroom of my own. Unlike my peers, I did not accept the positions offered close to home, but instead accepted a position teaching 7th grade English and 8th grade social studies at a small American school in the second largest city in the Dominican Republic—the same school where my Aunt had taught years before. The school boasted the only dual accredited Dominican and U.S. program in the city and was known for importing American-educated, English speaking teachers to work with a primarily Dominican student population. I got the necessary immunizations, packed two suitcases, hugged my family goodbye, and set out on my adventure. When my flight landed in Santiago, it was dark, but immediately I felt the embrace of humid air and the rustle of palm trees waving in the wind, seemingly in time to the strains of merengue from a nearby *colmado*. My wish had come true.

As it is with most new teachers, my first year was challenging. It was challenging even before my first day with students! I walked into my classroom anxious to make it my own and found cement floors and walls, wobbly ceiling fans, and aluminum-slatted windows that slammed shut with a gust of wind. I opened the creaky top drawer of my filing cabinet to find papers that felt wet to the touch and yellowed from a summer break.

Next, I walked around the small student desks and imagined the classroom as I dreamed it would be: a colorful place full of chatter, learning, and imagination. My principal unlocked the metal cabinet, revealing sets of middle school novels and social studies texts. Teacher's manuals were absent, a quick count revealed not even full-class sets of novels and no other curriculum or materials. The sparkling vision in my head seemed to fade just a smidge, but I squared my shoulders, grabbed a student textbook for each grade level, found a seat at my official teacher desk and began my work. For the task of creating a curriculum, I felt prepared. I quickly learned, however, how unprepared I was for the task before me. My position was to teach in the U.S. accredited program, serving students who were either in the American track, or the dual-program track. The program lacked a written curriculum or any development to prepare a first-year teacher for a multilingual, transnational student population.

On my first day as a teacher, my students appeared nearly the same in their matching uniforms of khaki and blue. Later, I came to realize that they fell on a wide range along a continuum, from Scott, a student from Texas, whose parents served as missionaries in the city; to Jorge, who had spent various years of his education in New York living with an aunt; and finally to Cristina, whose family surname appears often throughout Frank Moya Pons's *The Dominican Republic: a National History* (1995). Despite the homogeneity of their uniforms, these students claimed various citizenships and carried different passports—with some claiming more than one and carrying two! They soaked in the sun at the beach during *Semana Santa* (Holy Week), held contentious debates in *Spanglish* about whether the Yankees or the Red Sox were superior, and sang

the *Himno Nacional* (national anthem) each Monday morning before classes commenced as the Dominican banner was lifted above the campus. I was fascinated by the ease in which so many of them claimed one cultural identity and then slipped into another.

If asked, these students would claim their bilingualism with pride and those who were in the dual-track program studied in both English and Spanish throughout the day. The secondary program was set up with three track-options, in which students could meet not only U.S. graduation requirements, but also Dominican Ministry of Education standards with Spanish literature, grammar, Dominican history, agriculture, electricity, and French, which were taught in Spanish. There was also the option for students to take the American-track, in which students had more flexibility in their schedules for electives because they were not required to take any of the Dominican-track programs, however, those students planning to study at universities on the island would need Dominican-track prerequisites. In the secondary program, 7-12th grades, there were approximately 300 students, of whom the largest percent were of Dominican descent and a very small percent were made up of American, European, or Korean students whose families worked in the area. Of the approximately 270 Dominican students in the secondary school, 250 elected to follow the dual-track program while the remaining 20 students were on either the Dominican track, or the American track.

With so many students in the secondary program studying in English and Spanish each day, students moved effortlessly in conversation between the two languages, both inside and outside the classroom. Prevalence of “Spanglish,” created a conflict among teachers and students. The Spanish and Dominican history teachers complained about the

state of students' Spanish and their English teachers moaned at the proficiency of their English. Each language teacher complained that students "used" the "other" language as a way to cheat, or be disrespectful to teacher who did not know the "other" language. One of the favorite topics in middle school team meetings became the "English Issue."

Teachers whose classes were in Spanish complained that in their classes, students spoke English to one another too often and those whose classes were taught in English lamented that the students were not speaking English enough! Meeting after meeting about what should be done. Fines? "English Only" or "Spanish Only" signs? Loss of privileges?

I sat at the table and doodled on my meeting agenda. The discussion seemed pointless to me. I had spent eight years studying Spanish while sitting in high school and college classrooms; I felt that students, who were proficient in each language, should be able to use both languages in class. I believed that the use of both languages could build greater proficiency in both languages. I could, however, understand the frustrations of my colleagues felt at not being able to understand some of what their students discussed in the "other" language. Regardless of the consequence, I believed my students would still move back and forth between English and Spanish with envious ease. Why couldn't all these teachers understand and stop wasting my time on whether a five-peso fine for using Spanish in English class was too much? In that moment, a nascent idea emerged. There was a cosmological mismatch between the binational bilingualism of my students and the orientations of many of their English and Spanish teachers.

I wish I could say that I left the "English Issue" staff meetings and determined a course of action that changed the language landscape at school, and thus, the

understanding of my transnational students by their teachers. Instead, my frustration grew. I felt powerless to enact change and voiceless as the novice twenty-something teacher on the team. At the end of the year, I packed my belongings, closed the file cabinet for another summer, and locked the books away—along with binders of my curriculum—and chalked up my first year of teaching as a disorienting experience. I felt isolated. I wondered if there was something wrong with my perceptions about my students and their language dynamics; I wondered whether a career as a teacher was the right path for me.

I returned to the wide expanses of my Nebraska home, absent of palm-covered mountains. I tried to shut the door of my teaching world; I tried to ignore the pull of my island. But, my students, their stories, and their families remained in my consciousness even as I dabbled in college admissions, pharmaceutical sales, and other ways of making a living. In ten short months these families had become an extension of my own. I missed late night conversations with middle school mothers over *tapas* on a Friday night. I missed the sense of pride and awe I felt in watching “my kids” dancing at a *quince*, suddenly more like adults than on the brink of adulthood! I missed the warmth of the bonds I had felt, once I had been embraced as nearly *Dominicana*. I missed the adventure of each day in my classroom. The vision of that room filled with laughter and learning had become a reality and it glittered in my memory. In those many hours on the road in my pharmaceutical territory, I struggled not only with my “homesickness” for the Island, but also through the conflict of my questions and doubts. How had my training not fully prepared me for the task of teaching my diverse student population and their varied

needs? What were the needs of these students that were not being met and how could I have adapted my instruction to better address their needs? How could I have worked within the prescribed system, which contained policy upon which I disagreed (e.g. the “English only rule”), and not have ended the school year in such defeat? How could I find these answers and how could change happen within a system that overlooked students’ ontologies.

I realized I had unfinished work in Santiago. So, I resubmitted my resume to my previous school and accepted the high school English teaching position, an assignment that matched me with 11th and 12th graders who had once been my middle school students. Preparing for the Dominican Republic again, I felt as if I were returning home. This time I was determined to become both student and teacher. Upon arrival on the campus, I found those two old binders, covered in dust in the corner of the same metal cabinet in the middle school classroom where I had left them, and I moved into a remarkably similar concrete box in the high school building. This time the desks were bigger and the uniform shirts were a different shade of blue, but the debates about the Yankees and the Red Sox were the same.

Once the school-year started, the “English-Only” rule was still the topic of many a high school staff meeting, but I spent little time in the teacher’s lounge, and more time in the courtyard listening to students. In the evenings as I graded essay upon essay, I reflected upon each day and felt the chafing of my unresolved inquiry. With each week’s planning, I opened myself up to experimentation, adapting each lesson according to what I learned about my students. I chastised myself for a failed experiment with a lesson or

celebrated another that seemed to connect a student's multiple realities of language and culture; I felt like a failure many more days than I felt a success. What I attempted to maintain was my perspective as a learner: I was learning from my students.

I relished my dual identity as teacher and learner and it is out of this perspective that this inquiry and study developed. I recognized, going into my second Dominican teaching experience with these students that my job was to prepare them for a globalized future. As hindsight (and the march of time) now shows, many of my students were headed to private and public universities in the United States, others were bound for a private Jesuit school in the city, and others would go to Spain, Italy, Switzerland, or other European countries to pursue university, fashion design, hotel management, or culinary school. But as I faced them in that high school classroom and forecast in much less detail what was to come for them next, I had no idea whether my students would return for a life on the island, or live in another part of the world. As a teacher/mentor/advocate I needed to help prepare them for transnational lives and that, in turn, meant understanding what such a life entailed. This task became increasingly apparent to me as I kept teaching; now it drives this thesis and my aspirations for subsequent doctoral-level study.

Just as my students would depart their secondary education for divergent destinations, they entered my classroom from diverse backgrounds. Many were transnational students or children of transnational families. They had varied histories according to how long their families had been practicing migration, their family structure, their socio-economic status, and level of education. (I more thoroughly explain 'transnational' and 'transnationalism' in the next section, but for now it can be usefully

summed up as a descriptor of those whose experiences and sense of self and identity, which cannot be encompassed by a mono-national lens.) Other students' families had long Dominican histories in positions of political and business power and brought a variety of cosmopolitan lenses and aspirations.

As cultural anthropologist Peggy Levitt (2001) explains in her study *The Transnational Villagers*, which is about the Dominican Republic, early Dominican migration to the United States was limited and was mainly composed of wealthy families and refugees escaping dictator Trujillo's rule. However, "Once begun, migration broadened to include a wider cross section of Dominican society. While relatively educated, middle-class individuals left during the 1960s and 1970s, during the two decades that followed, less-skilled workers and highly skilled professionals also migrated" (Levitt, 2001 p. 47). In Levitt's study, as well as in my own, each student and each story is profoundly different. However, each maintains characteristics that become quite commonplace among the narratives of transnationalism. The demographic diversity of my students and their prior experiences set up an interesting dynamic of making a national identity geographically transnational as the vast majority of these students identified themselves as *Dominicano/a*—whether *aqui*, on the island, or *alla*—over there.

After two years as a high school teacher in this second teaching stint in the Dominican Republic, I moved back to the United States three years ago in order to continue my formal education and work as a teacher in Nebraska. More confident in both my skills and identity as a teacher, I selected a metropolitan district and school with a growing Latino population, albeit not a particularly Dominican one. In my post-

Dominican Republic Nebraskan school, I found similar transnational stories among students from across Central and South America.

It was in my second year back in Nebraska that I was surprised to meet Maria. She gasped during my introduction and squealed “But Miss! You did not know? I AM Dominican!” It was like meeting a long-lost family member. By the end of the week, I had been invited to her home, kissed by her *abuela*, and had been given containers of *mangu*, a mashed plantain dish served for breakfast. We discussed Dominican *beisbol*, listened to *merengue*, and lamented about the gloom and haze of fall in Nebraska, while our friends on the island were sunning themselves on ‘our’ favorite beaches. Although Maria had not been at my Dominican high school, I suddenly recognized that I had met another student just like my previous ones, but this time on the other side of the border (in the U.S.). My task as an educator was the same: to mentor, teach, and be a friend to a student population not so different than on the island—students who needed to be prepared for life and work *aqui* or *alla*.

Thinking about Maria or the students I will introduce over the course of the following pages, I realize that I have created my own transnational self. I count the days to return to the island and to be once again embraced by those whom I consider my Dominican community. I am closely tied to my reality both *aqui* and *alla*. Through the days, weeks, months, and now a span of eight years that I have known these students and families, I have, according to my original students, become “*casi-Dominicana*” (nearly Dominican). When I return for a visit to the island, I am greeted and welcomed “home.” This identity, as one who is welcomed as an insider, possesses value in acquiring

understanding and confidence with transnationals whose stories overflow with a rich wealth of knowledge and insight about transnational life and educational needs of transnational students. I have assumed the role of transnational ‘learner’ and have made my former students my teachers.

The Study:

Following a review of transnational scholarship, I have outlined four case studies of students who represent different stories of transnationalism. I utilized an ethnographic case-study design and a carefully selected participant pool for both purposeful sampling and maximum variation of responses (Patton, 2002, pp. 40,45, 109). I collected data through survey, semi-structured interviews, and personal correspondence, in the hope that I would be able to capture the unique voice and intimate encapsulation of each participant’s story.

Each case study is told in three parts, following the multi-genre case-study pattern developed by feminist anthropologist Margery Wolf in her research of Taiwanese women in *A Thrice Told Tale*. I have attempted to model my writing after Wolf, who describes the same interactions in three different ways. First, I have described responses in participant’s own words (albeit with my editing), then I describe how various participants’ responses fit into the realm of transnational research, and finally, I filter each participant’s responses through my personal relationship with each of them, (Wolf, 1992 p. 7). While I share Wolf’s assumptions that any one genre of relating an account has both virtues and limitations and thus that triangulation gets us closer to some sense of

‘what is real,’ this piece does not overtly take on her engagements with feminist and post-modernist theory. Prior to delving into my participants’ thrice told tales, however, I need to clarify my understanding transnational scholarship and to credibly place these students in relation to that literature.

Review of Literature

The study of transnationalism is a relative newcomer to the older interdisciplinary study of migration and immigration. Unlike immigration patterns of the past, when migrants assimilated to the receiving country and established themselves and their sense of “home” in their new country, transnationals create a community and reality that disregards national or cultural borders. The term “immigrant” in this case, does not describe this highly mobile individual that retains ties to both their home and host country. Nina Glick Schiller explains that, “Our earlier conceptions of immigrant and migrant no longer suffice. The word migrant evokes images of a permanent rupture, of the uprooted, and the abandonment of old patterns and the painful learning of a new language and culture. Now, a new kind of migrating and population is emerging, composed of those whose networks, activities, and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies. Their lives cut across national boundaries and bring to societies into a single social field” (2006, p.1).

With the emergence of this newer pattern of migration, individuals develop broad networks of community. Luis Guarnizo, who specifically has focused his study on Dominican migrants, describes the term transnationalism as the “web of cultural, social,

economic, and political relationships, practices, and identities built by migrants across national borders” (1997 p. 287). The individuals who have forged these networks, known as transnationals, or transmigrants, Glick-Schiller describes as “immigrants who live their lives across national borders, participating in the daily life and political processes of two or more nation-states” (1997 p. 158).

Transnationals not only live across borders, but also develop extensive networks of community on either side of the border. This is not only true for Dominicans who live between the island and the United States, but can also be seen in transnationals who move between Mexico and the United States. Juan C. Guerra aptly describes transnational community as those

“who feel a strong sense of communal identification with other Mexican immigrants living in the neighborhood than they do with Chicanos...To some extent, their tendency to self-identify as *Mexicanos* is related to the fact that English is rarely spoken in the home and that group members travel back and forth between their homes in Chicago and *ranchos* in Mexico on a continual basis...I would argue then, that members of the social network interact with one another more in, and therefore imagine themselves most closely allied through a multidimensional, social space that I am here referring to as a transnational community.” (1998 p. 9)

Like the *Mexicanos* that Guerra describes in his study, Dominicans have established similar transnational community, especially large in pockets of New York, Rhode Island, Boston, and Miami. However, these communities of transnationals continue to grow into

new areas, even to Nebraska, where I have now worked with a small network of families in the metro area where I currently reside.

Ginetta Calendario explains the effect transnational movement and transmigrant identity can have on individuals and on transnational community. She describes Guarnizo's study of Dominicans in Washington Heights, but in her book *Black Behind the Ears*, she explains why transnational community is defined in a separate reality than the host or home society.

The sociologist Luis Guarnizo has undertaken an important study of Dominican entrepreneurship in which he argues that structural and social rejection by both U.S. and Dominican society has forced migrants in New York City to form a distinctive bi-national social world that accommodates both but does not assimilate either. That bi-national society is a heterogeneous yet cohesive one that operates in a transnational space and selectively activates elements of 'both U.S. and Dominican cultural influences.' Consequently, migrants are foreigners in both spaces and at home only in their bi-national society (Calendario 2007, p. 27).

My interest specifically lies in greater understanding how transnational movement has influenced the lives and stories of students who live in this transnational community and who may exist as foreigners except in an invisible region of transnational space. In order to outline this reality, let me first explain the history and development of transnational movement between the Dominican Republic and the United States. Then I will describe how transnationalism has forged a new Dominican identity—a transmigrant identity, and how that influence language and cultural shifts for transmigrants. Finally,

since my primary interest is in narrowing the scope of my study to secondary students, the final section of the review of literature does focus on youth and transnationalism. After the survey of current research, I will introduce four students whose stories have been shaped or influenced by their own transnational movement, or by peer's transnational movement and identity.

As the world continues to shrink, the story of a transnational individual becomes commonplace. The demographics of regions around the world shift and languages collide in an era of globalization (Mato, 1997, p. 170). In the past thirty years the development of new transnational identities have prompted new inquiry and a need for more precise definitions of transnationalism. New trends in migration no longer fit the paradigms of the past. No longer are immigrants settling and within three generations assimilating into the host's country's culture. Previous descriptions of migration and assimilation no longer apply to the new dynamics of migration (Glick-Schiller et al., 1997, p.1). Dynamics of immigration may have changed, but the motivation for movement is not a new phenomena. For many of these migrants, movement is a calculated decision, one that is rooted in a motivation to improve the socio-economic standard for a family.

This calculated decision for migration is described using the term "Transnationalism from below [which] refers to the active decision making by members of economically vulnerable households to reduce their vulnerability by enacting strategies that make advantage of legal, economic, and cultural resources that together are contextual features that shape transnational migrants' choices and cosmologies" (Hamann, Zuniga, & Garcia, 2006 p. 259). Michael Peter Smith first introduces this

concept of strategic transnational movement, explaining that current economic realities have made it difficult for individuals in developing nations,

To maintain nationally based survival strategies. The formation of binational and even multinational households capable of tapping into the income-producing capacities of labor demand in high-currency exchange rate societies became an alternative survival strategy that extended households and the social networks they formed into a global space (1994, p. 21).

A pattern of movement by individuals in order to obtain a better life is not new. According to anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, “Deterritorialization, in general, is one of the central forces in the modern world because it brings laboring populations into the lower-class sectors and spaces of relatively wealthy societies...” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 37). Standing in contrast to this, Smith & Guarnizo (1998), point out the contrasting point of view:

The agents of “receiving states” remain relevant actors. States still monopolize the legitimate means of coercive power within their borders. Thus, it is problematic to conceptualize as a “deterritorialization of the state” the expansion of the reach of “states of origin” beyond their own national territorial jurisdiction into other state formations. (1998, p. 9)

This new face of migration requires new descriptors for these individuals who practice migration between two nation-states. This transnationalism is defined as “the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement” (Glick-Schiller et al., 1997 p. 1; Levitt, 2001, p. 6).

Those who practice this new form of migration are called “transmigrants,” who “develop and maintain multiple relations—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders” (Glick-Schiller et al., p.1; Levitt, 2001, p. 3). These individuals carry out these complex negotiations in order to minimize their risk. In order to preserve their survival, migrants choose their locale based upon where they can establish the best quality of life for themselves as well as their extended family.

As they establish themselves in either nation-state, they also adapt their identity to fit either reality. These transmigrants, “within their complex web of social relations, draw upon and create fluid and multiple identities grounded both in their society of origin and in their host societies. While some migrants identify more with one society than the other, the majority seem to maintain several identities that link them simultaneously to more than one nation” (Glick-Schiller et al., 1997, p. 111; Levitt, 2001, p. 22). In a century when accessibility to transportation and mass media and communications is readily available, individuals have been able to cross national borders with relative ease and have maintained close networks in more than one nation. Appadurai describes this epic change in immigration stating that, “diasporas bring the force of the imagination, as both memory and desire, into the lives of many ordinary people... Those who wish to move, those who have moved, those who wish to return, and those who choose to stay rarely formulate their plans outside the sphere of radio and television, cassettes and videos, newsprint and the telephone. For migrants, both the politics of adaptation to new environments and the stimulus to move or return are deeply affected by a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 6). Transnational individuals

create “imaginary” transnational spaces in which aspects of multiple cultures can intersect through media and communication.

Appadurai refers to this transnational space as an *ethnoscape*, defining it as “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree” (Appadurai, 1996, p. 33). Within this broader definition, the focus of this study is to look at the individuals within this *ethnoscape* whose lives are lived between two nations.

This new category of transnational allows an individual to maintain strong ties and an identity-link to more than one nation-state. Around the world, some countries are beginning to recognize this new individual. Most nations sending migrants “are changing their citizenship laws to allow dual citizenship for their emigrants and have created special government offices, ministries, and institutions to locate, work with, and represent their population abroad” (Glick-Schiller et al., 1997, p. 161; Guarnizo, 1997, p. 282).

Transnationalism and the Dominican Republic

One such country that has begun to recognize and rethink what it means to have a transnational citizen is the Dominican Republic. Located in the Caribbean on the island *Hispaniola*, the Spanish-speaking nation shares the island with the French/Creole speaking nation of Haiti. The Dominican Republic has shared ties with the United States throughout much of its history—as far back as the late 1780s the United States had

become an example of independence for the small dominion of the powerful Spanish empire, although the Dominican Republic did not become an independent country until 1821 (briefly) and more enduringly in 1844, when it declared itself independent of Haiti. In 1916, the United States established a military occupation that continued until a 1921-1924 extended evacuation. As late as the 1960s, a U.S. military presence existed in the Dominican Republic. Following the assassination of dictator Rafael Trujillo in 1961, the country went through a period of instability. In 1965, U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered 42,000 U.S. soldiers to the Dominican Republic (Pons, 1995, p. 388). The U.S. helped to finance a rebirth of democratic rule in the country, financial support continued into the 1970s.

While military rule set the stage for dictatorship after the first occupation (by creating no democratic institutions), the country did develop a stronger infrastructure in the first half of the 20th Century: a network of roads connected remote parts of the island, school numbers increased, healthcare and conditions improved, and construction projects abounded (Pons, 1995, p. 336-337). More relevant to this study, the occupations “also left a marked taste for the consumption of U.S. goods...A marked Americanization of the language also took place...U.S. games and toys became popular; and baseball eventually replaced cockfighting as a national sport...years of foreign rule left the Dominican Republic with certain cultural ties to the United States” (Pons, 1995, p. 338).

These close cultural ties, made the U.S. a natural refuge for the initial diaspora from the Dominican Republic, but the bulk of the transnational movement between the Dominican Republic and the United States is relatively young and does not follow

traditional migration patterns (Guarnizo, 1997, p. 283). Initially, mass migration occurred as a result of political persecution during Trujillo's dictatorship; wealthy and middle-class, educated Dominicans fled the island, fearing imprisonment and abuse. Later, motivations for migration expanded and broadened as Dominicans from all socio-economic classes began to migrate to pursue greater economic opportunities, to reunify family units, political reasons, and to seek greater educational attainment (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991, pp. 1-2; Garcia-Coll and Kerivan-Marks 2001, p. 108). Today, Dominicans are known for their continual back and forth movement while they are in the United States, but Dominicans are not known for greater assimilation to U.S. culture with each generation. Instead, migrants retain their Dominican culture and language (Guarnizo, 1997, p. 288; Pita and Utakis, 2002, p. 318).

The migration between the Dominican Republic and the United States continues to defy traditional definitions of immigration; it "is no longer a one-way process. Indeed, a constant flow back and forth is common, especially for immigrants of the Caribbean, for whom trips to and from the east coast of the USA are relatively easy" (Dicker, 2006, p. 714). Dominican-American transnationalism has a relatively short history, and the greatest shift has occurred in the past 40 years. Since that initial diaspora, "Dominicans [have come to] constitute one of the fastest-growing and most residentially concentrated groups" (Guarnizo, 1997, p. 283) on the U.S. mainland. According to Guarnizo, "Dominicans did not begin their movement in order to assimilate. Rather, their pattern of transnationalism "brought the seemingly distant and unattainable opportunities of the US, and most especially New York City, into the immediate lived and dreamed reality of

many Dominicans on the island” (1997, p. 292). Economic opportunity for both skilled and unskilled workers, allows migrants to increase earning opportunity on the U.S. side of the border. According to Grasmuck and Pessar’s (1991) study of Dominican immigration, (cited in Levitt, 2001, p. 88) it was then common, for individuals to send remittances back to the island to provide a higher standard of living for those living for family members. This influx of money into the Dominican economy has radically shifted the consumer power for individuals who receive these remittances. Grasmuck and Pessar describe transnationally-linked homes as more likely to have expensive appliances and electronics than non-migrants on the island (1991, p. 72-73).

Dominican-American author Junot Díaz, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Literature for his novel *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), describes Washington Heights [New York] in his collection of short stories entitled *Drown*. In his short story “Negocios,” he describes such a transnational, a father who sends remittances home and has left a promise behind with his family that he will send plane tickets to reunite them one day. “His first year in Nueva York he lived in Washington Heights, in a roachy flat above what’s now the Tres María’s restaurant. As soon as he secured his apartment and two jobs, one cleaning offices and the other washing dishes, he started writing home. In the first letter he folded four twenty-dollar bills...” (1996, p. 177). The structure Díaz describes, and Grasmuck and Pessar and Levitt detail, creates a dependence upon remittances and those family members sending money from the other side.

Many Dominicans have complex transnational networks of family that also allow for the continual stream of Dominicans and their business between the Dominican Republic and the United States. Within Dominican culture, family is a core value that helps to create a sense of belonging for Dominicans on each side of the border. Family networks facilitate transnational movement and also reinforce the motivation for transnational movement (Pita and Utakis, 2002, p. 318). Dominicans now make up “the largest immigrant group in New York City” and have taken over entire neighborhoods like Washington Heights in Manhattan. (Pita and Utakis, 2002, p. 318). Pita and Utakis refer to these individuals as “immigrants.” However today, while Today, Washington Heights is home to the largest population of Dominicans outside the Dominican Republic and “a common refrain among Dominicans is that New York is the Dominican Republic’s second largest city, as it is home to more Dominicans than Santiago de los Caballeros, officially the second largest city of the country” (Candelabra, 2007, p. 10, 142).

Today, “The Heights” continues to be a receiving point for immigrating Dominicans—much like Boston and Miami are others—but more Dominicans are migrating beyond and creating new neighborhoods of concentrated Dominican culture. In these neighborhoods, Dominicans retain to their national identity through language, cultural traditions, and community—even while living out a new identity far beyond their island’s shores. In Junta Diaz’s story “Edison, New Jersey,” the narrator states that, everything in Washington Heights is Dominican.

You can't go a block without passing a Quisqueya Bakery or a Quisqueya Supermercado or a Hotel Quisqueya. If I were to park the truck and get out nobody would take me for a deliveryman; I could be the guy who's on the street corner selling Dominican flags. I could be on my way home to my girl. Everybody's on the streets and the merengue's falling out of windows like TVs" (Días, 1996, p. 137).

As a sending-country, the Dominican Republic recognizes the transnational identity of many of its citizens and has even adapted its own constitution in order to incorporate the transnational-Dominican. The Dominican constitution now allows its "citizens living abroad to hold dual citizenship and vote in national elections" (Smith, 1997, cited in Pita and Utakis p. 319, Levitt, 2001, p. 141). Even President Leonel Fernandez, now in 2011, in the middle of his third term (allowed by another change in the Dominican law) is "a Dominican transmigrant who holds a U.S. permanent resident visa" (Glick-Schiller, 1997, p. 161). Leonel (most commonly referred to by his first name) completed much of his education in the United States, "attended public school in Washington Heights, then moved to the Dominican Republic to attend law school" (Pita and Utakis, 2002, p. 319). In addition to his work for his island nation, he encourages Dominican-Americans to gain a political voice for the Dominican population in New York, and even more broadly, in the United States. Not only has Leonel campaigned to cater to the transnational individual, he publicly celebrated his Upper West Side roots during his first campaign for office (Levitt, 2001, p. 127). Today, at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st Century, all three major parties in the Dominican Republic have

recognized the importance of transnational politics and have made attempts to reach out to Dominicans living in the United States.

Dominican Transnational Identity:

Many Dominicans live between the two realities of “home.” They possess a Dominican identity that transcends national borders. According to Guarnizo,

“rather than becoming assimilated Americans or remaining traditional Dominicans, migrants’ sense of self was most often characterized by a flexible identity (immigrant Dominicans in the US and Americanized Dominicans, or *Dominicananyorks*, while on the island)” (1997, p. 289).

As they move between two vastly different worlds and assume different faces of their flexible identity, they “maintain a ‘dual frame of reference,’ constantly comparing their situation in one location with the one they have experienced in the other, so that ‘the standard used to assess their current situation is borrowed from the society they left behind’” (Glick-Schiller et al., p. 163).

Dominicans in this transnational movement seem to maintain aspects of their cultural identity that will bring them together in a united identity, either in the United States or on the island. There are varying examples of this phenomenon that extend from the *bodega* selling fruit on the sidewalk in Washington Heights, to the game of street baseball being played on the next block over. In Ginetta Candelario’s (2007) study, *Black Behind the Ears*, she details the lives of Dominican women in Washington Heights and their cultural preoccupation with having “good” hair and their trips to the salon to make it

that way. She describes the warm community of a typical salon that acts as reflection of the salons these same women frequented back on the island; a refuge of familiarity.

The Relationship between Language and Identity:

Besides the national obsession with *beisbol* and a Dominican national team with jerseys emblazoned with *Soy Dominicano* (I am Dominican) that plays in stadiums across the island during American baseball's off-season (from October to February), another aspect of culture that unifies individuals to their Dominican identity is language.

Dominican-Spanish is unique and when spoken with its characteristic nuances (a sing-song lilt and absence of closing consonants) it provides a common link and identity between Dominicans, Dominican-Americans, and *Dominicanyorks*. For Dominicans living away from the island, "the Dominican variety of Spanish is closely linked to community identity and allegiance to the homeland" (Toribio, 2003 qtd in Dicker, 2006, p. 716)

Yolanda, one of the five subjects in Susan Dicker's study of Dominican Americans in Washington Heights, explains this link between language and identity, "Our language is very close to us. It's part of our identity. And young people today, even today, will shun another young person if they don't know Spanish" (2006, p. 719).

Remaining connected to Dominican Spanish is also a value both family-subjects in Almeida Toribio's 2003 study attempt to maintain with their children. Toribio explains that "Spanish language is viewed as an important feature of Dominican identity" and is maintained through a variety of activities from familial celebrations, to "listening to

Spanish-language radio stations, watching Spanish-language television programs, and attending Spanish-language religious services” (2000, p. 405) Of the immigrant children that Garcia-Coll and Kerivan-Marks (2009) studied from Cambodian, Portuguese, and Dominican families, they describe the deep connection between Dominican children and their language. Even Dominican children who live primarily in the United States maintain an association with the language and culture of the island. “Dominican children are not only part of households and a larger community that keeps the Spanish language and Latin-American culture alive, but they also have direct experiences with their parent’s native country...in fact, almost three quarters of Dominican parents report encouraging their children to feel good about their ethnicity” (Garcia-Coll and Kerivan-Marks, 2009, p. 118).

Dominican-American author Julia Alvarez, most famous for her novels *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1994), and *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1991), discusses her own challenging journey of finding her identity and voice and language as a binational, bilingual child, teen, and adult in her collection of essays *Something to Declare*. In her essay “So Much Depends,” Alvarez describes this tug of war within herself after her family left the Dominican Republic to escape Trujillo’s reign in the 1960s and established themselves in New York.

What I needed was to put together my Dominican and American selves. An uncle who lived in New York gave me a piece of advice embedded in an observation: ‘The problem with you girls is that you were raised thinking you could go back to where you came from. Don’t you see, you’re here to stay?’ ...Perhaps in an earlier

wave of immigration that would have sufficed—a good enough tradeoff, to leave your old country behind for the privilege of being a part of this one. But we were not satisfied with that (1998, p. 197).

Alvarez goes on to explain that, “what finally bridged these two worlds for me was writing.” (1998, p. 197). She found her identity through words that described her experience as an individual who always felt she was in the process of returning to one home or the other.

Dominican Youth and Transnationalism:

This emphasis upon using native language and an appreciation and pride in ethnicity and cultural heritage reflects parental concern—that children maintain a link to the sending country. The children in these families represent a sub-group of transnationals who are shifted between two realities, many times not of their own choice, and consequently have created a transnational identity. Many Dominican parents continually assess which national context will give their children the greatest advantages for the future. On one side, a major reason for the transnationalism of youth is the belief that youth will be better protected and grounded in Dominican values if they experience part of their education and coming of age on the island. Similar to the pattern Leslie Reese observed in her 2003 study of transnational Mexican families that many perceived greater danger for children in the United States to get involved with negative activities—like gangs, drugs, and disrespect, as compared to life in Mexico where families “knew the

families and children with whom their children associated, and were confident that neighbors would keep an eye out for all children” (Reese, 2003, p. 42).

Conversely, as Garcia-Coll & Kerivan-Marks (2001, p. 120) describe, other migrants enter the United States hoping to give their children greater educational opportunities, “as such, a majority of Dominican parents express high educational and occupational aspirations for their children. Ninety-eight percent of Dominican parents reported that they wanted their children to complete a college education.”

This dichotomy makes sense, when considering it within the context of transnationalism from below. Transnational parents attempt to balance their desire for their children to remain shielded and protected from dangers that they perceive to be greater in the United States, while also creating opportunity for their children to achieve greater socio-economic and educational attainment.

Children and youth have created their own transnational stories as their parents move them from place to place. Instead of assimilating or being allowed to fully assimilate, this new younger migrant carries on dynamic relationships to both home and host country. These transnational individuals inhabit a space that has also been labeled “sojourner” or “third-culture,”—especially when referring to children of highly mobile individuals. In their 2006 study of Mexican transnational children, Edmund Hamann et. al (2006) refer to these transnational children as “sojourners,” quoting M. Smith’s 1994 definition of this borderless reality. These migrants “are currently seeking to orchestrate meaningful lives under conditions in which their life-worlds are neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’ but at one *both* ‘here’ and ‘there.’” (Smith, 1994 p. 17)

Another term that has also been used to attempt to describe this reality for transnational children is, “third-culture-kid,” these children “are raised in a neither/nor world. It is neither fully the world of their parents’ culture (or cultures) nor fully the world of the other culture (or cultures) in which they were raised. TCKs develop their own life patterns different from those who are basically born and bred in one place. Most TCKs learn to live comfortably in this world, whether they stop to define it or not” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009 p. 4). While TCK is used more often to designate wealthier transnational children (Brown and Lauder, 2009) for purposes of describing the youth I knew teaching in a private Dominican school TCK remains quite apt as a label.

In a (1990) study of Portuguese youth in Rhode Island, Adeline Becker describes this third culture identity, or “situational ethnicity,” and the ability of these young adults to shift among various cultural identities and seemingly without “stress of disorientation” (Becker, 1990, p. 49). Like the Portuguese students in Becker’s New England study, many Dominican youth have also created shifting cultural identities as a result of their back and forth movement, which Becker describes as situational ethnicity.

Dominican youth, whether born in the United States or on the island, seem to hold deep pride and connection to their cultural heritage, no matter what their citizenship(s) is(are). Pita and Utakis describe the challenge Dominican youth have in forging their identities, “in a survey of Dominican high school students in New York City, Castillo (1996) found that 95% considered themselves ‘Dominicans and proud of it, regardless of where they were born’ (2002, p. 320). Dominican students primarily raised in New York are labeled as *Dominicanyorks* when they return to the island, identifiable by their urban

styles and American slang. There seems to be a division between Dominican elites whose lives are fully grounded on the island and these migrants who shift back and forth, and then another difference between those transnationals who have attained greater socio-economic status abroad and transnationals who remain members of the working class. When those same students are in New York, “many Dominican [students] feel they have to choose between being Dominican or being ‘American’” (Pita and Utakis, 2002, p. 320). This choice is difficult for students, for many times it “pushes some to cling tightly to their own language and culture.” (2002, p. 320). Pita and Utakis found that most students retain their Dominican culture and their Spanish language—a challenge can become even greater in some of the urban schools Dominican students attend where this is great racial diversity and little or not formal support for their continuing development of Spanish language skills.

U.S. schools have become a microcosm of the world outside—a diverse and demographically shifting place. Dominican or Dominican-American students struggle to find their identity within such walls. Phenotypically they cannot be, in many cases, separated from mixed-race African-Americans, which leaves their language and culture as what distinguishes them. In Benjamin Bailey’s case-study of a Dominican-American youth in a Rhode Island school, Bailey identified the complex manipulation of language to form and inform one’s identity. Dominican-American youth “explicitly define their race in terms of language rather than phenotype, explaining that they speak Spanish, so they are Spanish” (Bailey, 2000, p. 556). Dominican transmigrants are able, then, to position their identity through their manipulation of their language. As bilinguals,

“Dominican-Americans use both English and Spanish resources creatively, selectively invoking Dominican and American interpretive frameworks and highlighting particular facets of their multi-faceted identities” (Bailey, 2000 p. 561). Thus, Dominican-Americans are able use Dominican-Spanish to create solidarity with their fellow Dominicans in a shared Dominican culture and use their American-English to position themselves within the dominant American youth culture. They possess the power to morph identities through “the ability to speak varieties of both English and Spanish.” They can choose “to align themselves situationally with members of diverse social categories, but it also differentiates them from individuals who are not Dominican and American” (Bailey, p. 563).

Beyond language and identity, transnationalism also affects Dominican students and their achievement in school. According to Pita and Utakis, “[C]hildren from the Dominican community move between two school systems and as a result, may suffer academically in both countries” (2002, p. 321). The challenge on either side of the Atlantic of the Dominican transnational shift is to understand the challenges and advantages transnational students carry into the classroom “[N]eglecting the needs of these transnational children can lead to devastating academic and social outcomes” (Pita and Utakis, 2002, p. 321). While the challenges of transnationalism and education across borders can be devastating, and changes in educational policy and instruction may well be merited, as Hamann et al. (2006) depict, there are those students who experience great personal and academic success as transnationals.

According to Patricia Sánchez from her study of transmigrant students moving between Mexico and California, the school should assume responsibility to not only teach globalization, but to “engage students and bring their attention to this change” (2007, p. 490). While Sánchez references school calendar and school paperwork adaptations established to help transnational students and their families, at the time of her study, she points out that her participants’ “alternative way of thinking is never officially recognized in school” (Sánchez, 2007 p. 513).

Like Sánchez’s findings, Becker found in her study of Portuguese students that, “the school was not assisting them in adapting to their bi-cultural reality. It was instead, trying to negate one of these cultures...Rejection of the ethnic group by the school was neither blatant nor conspiratorial. It was, perhaps, all the more insidious, because the teachers were acting out of the best of intentions—a desire to see the students become Americanized as quickly as possible” (1990, p. 53). Angela Valenzuela, in her study of Mexican-American students in Houston, describes this attempt to assimilate students as “subtractive,” which includes “assimilationist policies and practices that are designed to divest Mexican students of their culture and language” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 20). Valenzuela goes on to describe that when schools practice such cultural assimilation, they fail to recognize the social capital students carry with them into the classroom.

Xáe Reyes describes similar practices, and explains that, “schooling of migrant students in the United States has assigned a superior status to the host culture, language, and behaviors. This stance almost inevitably implies that other cultures are inferior, other languages undesirable, and other behaviors inappropriate” (2000, p. 46). Transnational

Dominican students have faced similar attitudes and have struggled as they have attempted to forge their own bi-cultural identity, while teachers, administrators, and policy-makers make their own attempts to acculturate these students.

Teachers, administrators, and other school personnel should recognize the challenges transnational students face and “listen closely...and recognize the global understandings and experiences they undergo on a daily and cumulative basis. This is not all unlike bringing funds of knowledge into the classroom and teaching in a culturally relevant manner.” (Sánchez, 2007, p. 513) Transnational students carry with them the sum of their unique life experiences and knowledge.

In their 1992 article in which they examine how Mexican transnational children construct knowledge based on their experiences, Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg define *funds of knowledge* as “the strategic and cultural resources that households contain...[that] not only provide the basis for understanding the cultural systems from which these U.S.-Mexican children emerge, but that they are important as useful assets in the classroom” (1992, p. 313). Recognition of these funds as well as application of such knowledge, according to Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, is “necessary to build constructive relationships which are needed to improve the educational quality and equity in schools that serve [transnational] U.S.-Mexican populations” (1992, p. 313).

Becker also asserts that reform is necessary in order to serve bi-cultural and bilingual students. She challenges the notion that a district-wide goal for cultural pluralism or multicultural appreciation is not enough. Students must experience an

appreciation for their bi-cultural identity in every classroom, and through every curriculum (1990, p. 54).

Yet another researcher, Laurie Olson, also discusses this phenomenon in the Southern California high school that she studied for her book, *Made in America: Immigrant Students in Our Public Schools*. Olson describes the district, which “boasts one of the first newcomer high schools in the nation, placing it on the map as an innovator in serving immigrants” (1997, p. 152). However, Olson is in agreement with Becker as she also describes that

a struggle takes place among the adults at Madison High over the meaning of and responses to the increasing diversity of their community. It has been a source and subject of overt ideological and political struggle in Bayview. It is a struggle between those who view the answer to diversity as conformity to a single cultural model and to a single language, and those who view the survival of a multicultural community as relying on embracing the differences and rectifying the inequities between groups (1997, p. 152).

Regrettably, in each of these cases, immigrant and transnational students are caught in the middle of political struggle, while their educational and individual needs are neglected. Sanchez underlines this point, encouraging teachers to “‘listen closely’ to their transnational immigrant students and recognize the global understandings and experiences they undergo on a daily and cumulative basis” (2007, p. 513).

Unfortunately for the children, it seems as if, at the moment when students are able to gain academic ground and educators begin to understand the “funds of

knowledge” transnational students bring to the classroom another move happens. The continual shift is worrisome because it can keep a child from gaining full linguistic fluency in the primary language of either country” (Peggy Levitt, 2001, qtd in Pita and Utakis, p. 322). These challenges seem to be rooted in their literacy needs as well as in the gaps in their academic knowledge because of their movement (Olson, 1997, p. 154). Both Levitt and Olson focus on how movement causes disparities in language and literacy. However, could this gap be bridged simply if the school had a stronger response to student-mobility and greater sensitivity to students’ unique set of knowledge and experiences? Schools need to not only be prepared to appreciate students’ transnational realities, but also to be responsive to these students’ literacy needs and academic content discrepancies.

Elaine Rubinstein-Avila discusses these specific needs as she studies a single Dominican high school student in the United States. Rubinstein-Avila becomes a learner, studying ‘Yanira’, attempting to place the puzzle pieces in order drawing from her information about her literacy experiences in the Dominican Republic and in the United States. This understanding of Yanira’s prior knowledge and experience allowed Rubinstein-Avila to construct a picture of Yanira’s literacy learning needs. Rubinstein-Avila’s understanding was vastly different than the understanding of Yanira’s teachers, who expressed frustration at Yanira’s moving back and forth, claiming that each time Yanira had to “start from scratch.” These same teachers, according to Rubinstein-Avila, “continuing conversations with three teachers also revealed their limited knowledge about the process of developing bilingualism” (2007, p. 41). Rubinstein-Avila observed

Yanira's frustration as she struggled to understand different educational expectations on each side of the transnational border. She points out that in order for Yanira to experience success, she must find a "safety zone" in which she can practice her English as well as scaffolding and accommodations that allow such students to access the content knowledge at grade level. Finally, Rubinstein-Avila explains, "Yanira's portrait underscores that immigrant youths' literacy practices cannot be understood in isolation, that is, from a monolingual perspective or from school-related experiences alone...[they] ought to be viewed from a bilingual and biliterate lens as well as from the lens of transnationalism" (2007, p. 42).

As movement between the Dominican Republic and the United States grows in strength and frequency, attending to the construct of a transnational lens with which to view the world, becomes more necessary. This continual movement creates a new transnational identity that embraces and transcends both countries. Dominican transnationals do not fit the traditional definitions of migration as a process of moving but then resettling. Instead, Dominicans, through their transnational movement and the complex networks of family they have created on either side of the shift, have now created a second generation of transnationals. These transnational youth have adapted and created their set of identities.

Researchers like Guarnizo, Candelario, and Rubinstein-Avila as well as literary figures like Julia Alvarez and Junot Díaz depict what it means to have a Dominican identity, no matter the locale. My characterization, taken from journals I wrote while living on the island, reflects a similar depiction. They are Dominican. They are

Dominican-American. They are American. They are *Dominican*yorks. They are citizens of the island, of the United States; some carry dual-citizenship. They sit on the sidewalk in Washington Heights, radio blaring the World Baseball Series, wearing a *Soy Dominicano* jersey—while playing dominoes. Alternately, men are sitting outside a *colmado* in *la ciudad* on the island, arguing about who will win the next Yankee vs. Red Socks match-up. The volume of the dispute increases as the rum level decreases in the tall glass bottle. Stray dogs roam the sidewalk, inching ever closer to the table covered in dominoes, bordered by sweating glasses that have been filled with *Ron Brugal* and just a splash of *Coca-Cola*. Women sit in rocking chairs on the porch, their hair stretched over large rollers and covered in netting, gossiping. Children play a pick-up game of baseball around the corner on a dirt outfield, the plastic cap to the water jug, a ball, and wide stick, the bat.

Before transitioning from this general survey of the field of transnational study and the Dominican Republic, let me highlight a few key concepts that will be revisited in the following case-studies. First of all, transnationalism is a growing field of study and as movement across borders becomes more commonplace, research concerning its effect on nations, communities, and individuals will help us understand how globalization is reshaping concepts of place, culture, and home. The Dominican Republic as a sending country has a rather strong (if short) history of transnational movement to the United States. This movement currently affects more than one generation of transnationals, whose lives, as described by transnational scholar Michael Peter Smith (1994) is not rooted in a single locale but rather, are “neither ‘here’ nor there’ but at one *both* ‘here’

and ‘there’”(p. 17) The following case-studies examine this multinational reality specifically for youth and young adults whose lives have been effected by transnationalism in the Dominican Republic.

The Stories

I have always been intrigued by my students’ stories and how the experiences have helped to shape them before they even walked into my classroom. While each story is unique, I find that each is also representative of a symbolic reality that is not so unique. If one looks beyond the nuances, patterns within each transnational story begin to emerge. In Willa Cather’s (1913) novel *O’Pioneers*, one of her characters reflects, "Isn't it queer: there are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before; like the larks in this country, that have been singing the same five notes over for thousands of years" (Cather, 1989, p. 89). There are thousands of transnational stories, each unique, but each possessing strands of the same story. What if we could focus on the patterns (as Cather describes) that are similar and identify methods to provide support to transnational students who navigate their own transnational reality every day?

What follows is a series of four case studies with data collected over the course of ten months. Each story not only outlines the nuances that make each of these students profoundly individual and unique in my mind, but also illustrates the patterns of transnational-reality that exists across all four case-studies. After years spent teaching in a classroom in the Dominican Republic, I couldn’t help but wonder how this history of

movement influenced the lives of my students. I could see differences among my students according to their transnational history. What were these differences? How did these experiences shape their perspectives on education and what made them successful as learners?

Drawing upon these initial questions and forays into inquiry, and basing my research within the tradition of ethnography and to some extent memoir, students were invited to participate in a study about how transnationalism has had an effect on their lives. Students were purposefully selected as participants. Research methodologist Michael Quinn Patton explains that “Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry...Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than generalizations” (Patton, 2002, p. 230).

Students who were invited fell into four different categories: 1. Students who have spent their entire lives living and learning in the Dominican Republic, 2. Students who first lived in the Dominican Republic before moving to the United States, 3. Students who first lived in the United States and then moved to the Dominican Republic, and 4. Students who have moved numerous times back and forth between the Dominican Republic and the United States. Data was collected from these students through survey method and semi-structured interviews. Students selected for the four case studies were selected for the representative role of Dominican or Dominican-American society they play.

The purpose in both selection and in-depth study is to create a spectrum of response that serves to answer my two research questions. 1. What effects does transnational movement have upon student-identity? 2. What effects does transnational movement have upon student's perceptions of school and educational achievement? Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews, surveys, and informal conversations over dinner, at coffee, sitting with frozen lemonade at the beach, and via personal email and social-networking messaging. In the case of informal methodologies, I used fieldnotes and my journal to create text versions of data that, like the other components, could also be consistently analyzed. This multi-layered methodology allowed me to not only collect data in student's own words, but also to observe them in casual conversations and social situations. For the study, students' names and specific locations have been changed in order to protect student and family identity and out of respect for the relationship I maintain with each of these families. I have also checked my accounts with each of the interviewed students and they do not dispute any of my characterizations.

My history with these students is long in relationship to their age. All participants fell between the ages of 16 and 20 at the time of my formal data collection; I have known some of these students and their families for six years. Teaching at an American school in the Dominican Republic ushered me into an intimately small circle of Dominican families whose children are tightly interconnected. I was embraced as a part of this community, welcomed to family events, into family homes, and respected as a valued adult and mentor in these youth's lives. Leaving my positions to return to the U.S. did not

sever the strength of these relationships. Thanks to a modern age of Skype, social networking, and Blackberry Messaging, remaining in close contact and a significant part of these students' lives has been a relatively easy task. Each time I revisit the island, I am welcomed back "home" with open arms, a packed social calendar, and many times with more food than I could imagine eating in one sitting!

I recognize that adding researcher to the other roles I play in relationship to these young adults and their families I place myself in an unusual position. I am "a participant observer" according to Patton's definition, who has established "*an insider's view of what is happening, the emic perspective.*" Assuming the role of participant, my goal is "to become capable of understanding the setting as an insider while describing it to and for outsiders" (Patton, 2002, p. 268).

J. Douglas Toma describes the power of "subjective qualitative research" in his 2000 study in which he describes the methods he used to collect data about football traditions and cultures on eleven college campuses across the country. He explains that, "When subjective qualitative research works, it is when researchers describe contexts in ways that bring them alive. When this happens, the researcher becomes an insider—a partner with the subject who is responsible for bringing the subject to life for the reader" (Toma, 2000, p. 182). My hope is that in positioning my "insider status," like talking about my role as a main information source for Julio and his family (in the last case study), I gain credibility with readers and make transparent how I might have obtained a better understanding of my former students and their transnational narratives. Because of how I was in relation to the individuals and settings described later, I will be able to

describe their experiences and knowledge in order that teachers, administrators, and practitioners who serve transnational students better than if this research project had involved a need to build credibility without a running start.

So, before I describe the four individual cases, perhaps it makes sense to describe further the context from which those cases were selected. On a recent trip back to the island, I sat in the main office chatting with the executive secretary when the secondary principal walked in wagging his cell phone in front of him. With a chagrined look on his face, he handed over his own cell phone, “It’s for you.” He shook his head and crossed his arms, an amused look replacing the chagrin. I held the phone up to my ear, “Hello?”

“Misssssss!” a greeting shouted in unison from a group of senior girls met my ears. I grinned. “Get ready! We are on our way to come get you for lunch!” Before I knew it, I was stuffed in a mini-van overcrowded with teen girls who clamored to fill me in on everything I had missed in the previous months. We zipped in and out of traffic on the *autopista*. I barely could hide my own amusement when we arrived at the restaurant they had selected for our reunion lunch: TGI Friday’s—a recent city addition. Our conversation over lunch was recorded (with much background noise) so much of the following conversation has been taken from notes taken during the outing and reflections recorded that evening. Our conversation took place primarily in English, but with a mix of *Spanglish* interspersed with lots of laughter!

I teased them as we walked through the door, “You know I can get this all the time in the States, right?” They laughed. “But miss, they have free refills on Coke here!” Over our American food and bottomless sodas, I was brought up to date about the various

themes of *quinceañeras* I had missed, whose younger siblings had had first communion, and what the plans for post graduation parties were. As the news died down a bit, my students began to inquire about the life I had created since returning to the United States. Arelis leaned back in her chair. “So, Miss, what about your education? You know, what you left us for? Are we going to be calling you Doctor Phillips soon?” she asked with a glint of humor in her eye and an edge of seriousness in her voice. As I began to share about graduate school and my study, I observed the nodding heads and the side comments about *domincanyorks* or an elbow nudge in Nicole’s direction, who had recently been transplanted back to the Dominican Republic. Bianca leaned elbows on the table, sharing that after her grandfather died, her grandmother, “she was left with nine mouths to feed, and you know, being in the Dominican Republic, it was hard to influence your children to go to school. But my mother and aunt were fortunate enough to attend school, only this cost them to be away from their family. My mom was fourteen when she and my aunt were sent over to the U.S. and I think about that, you know. I mean, it was hard for my mother; she started working when she was fourteen. She never finished her career [college education] but at least she finished high school.”

Other girls around the table nodded their heads in understanding. Bianca, like Nicole had moved back and forth throughout her elementary, middle, and high school years. Unlike these two, Arelis, Catalina, and Mabelle had spent their entire academic lives living in the Dominican Republic. Arelis’s parents were both doctors who had completed their training in Spain, Catalina’s family owned a supply company for tile and concrete, and Mabelle’s family was well known on the island, as their extended family

owned a rum factory. Conversations continued, this time more focused on who was planning on going to the States for college, or who was going to shop in New York or was venturing to Europe for a summer tour.

I share this in order to grant the reader the opportunity to see these stories for what they are; they are told through the eyes of a teacher who knows these individuals and their families well. I understand that unlike many transnational stories, my student's socio-economic status allows travel to and from the U.S. and to Europe with financial ease. This adult, teacher, and mentor (i.e. me) has achieved a status as one of the community and does not gather data or write as one who has been merely a spectator and stranger. J. Douglas Toma describes this type of qualitative researcher as a "subjective," one whose research relies on "strong connections between researchers and subjects. These connections allow for the rich description of contexts and experiences that are the essence of good qualitative data" (Toma, 2000, p. 177).

This proximity to the subjects allows the reader to immerse himself as one of the community so that he may see, hear, smell, and listen alongside a trusted member of a Dominican community that has been deeply impacted by transnational living. Toma claims that the "subjective" researcher is able to establish a "transactional nature of interviews," allowing for "context" and a "reconceptualizing" of ideas that "help people to think through their responses in new and interesting ways." All of this, Toma asserts, "leads to a simple rule: As interactions between researchers and subjects deepen (epistemology), data about phenomena and people—and the interpretations that result from data—become better (ontology)" (Toma, 2000, p.181).

What follows is a collection of such stories, stories in which I am deeply invested, research in which these students are deeply invested. They have a stake in sharing their stories; they understand that from their stories, we can all learn about transnational realities. Each case study is formatted with the student's story in his or her own words first, drawn together from their surveys, interviews, interactions, and correspondence. They are told along with my descriptions, which I hope will bring each to life. Following their stories, I have surveyed how their stories relate to the review of literature, and finally, I share my own observations and reflections as what J. Douglas Toma would define as a “‘passionate participant’”—one who has facilitated the data collection process, and whose relationship with the following students adds another layer to the significance of the data (Toma, 2000, p. 182).

The Case Studies:

Arelis

Part I: Narrative

Arelis's reputation far preceded her entrance into my classroom, thanks to the chatty teachers in the lounge who lamented her know-it-all ways. In our first meeting, she was a precocious 6th grader who sat and read while her older brother counted down his detention minutes after school. Before long, (thanks to her brother Manuel's pension for pranks and her related need to keep waiting through her brother's detentions) she began to ask for other tasks to complete. Her favorite job was organizing the classroom library and talking about books. Books, books, books. When I left Santiago the first time, I had

no idea that Arelis's life would cross my path again. This time, she was a loquacious sophomore who still had a love of literature, and I was her high school English teacher.

Arelis and her brother Manuel became an extension of my own family, which was especially dear to me since my family was miles away back in the United States. Since their parents worked long hours as physicians at the newly opened private hospital, they spent many extra hours after school in extra-curricular activities and classes. When they were in high school, they came over to the apartment building where many of the teachers from the school lived for a study groups and food and fellowship nights. Conversely, I often became a guest in their home, which was famous among the SMCS community for the best lasagna and the best open-air patio, perfect for lounging after gorging oneself on way too much pasta! Arelis's father, a gastroenterologist and her mother, an endocrinologist, both spoke English very well, and warmly welcomed their children's teachers into their home.

Arelis's family has never immigrated to the United States. But her parents consistently encouraged both their children to acquire a solid education, which they hoped was available through our American school in Santiago. Arelis's face goes up in a half smile as she discusses her family with a blend of pride and humility. "My parents always told me that the only thing they can guarantee me is a good education; all throughout my family history, that has been the family emblem and message." Arelis is intensely proud of what her parents have accomplished. Despite economic struggles, they both became university graduates of the local Jesuit private university, but also graduates of medical school in Spain. It is with almost hesitation that she admits that her maternal

grandparents didn't even finish high school. "In the 1930s in the Dominican Republic you were considered professional, by just completing high school, which was rare," she explains, "from my father's side of the family, both my grandmother and grandfather finished high school." Arelis's paternal grandparents became involved with an evangelical training center for the Free Methodist Church in the 1940s. They worked their way up and eventually Maria's grandmother was made the institute's English and domestic care teacher, and her grandfather was made the director. On an island where Protestant Christians are in minority to the overwhelming Catholic majority, Arelis's father selected the local Jesuit University for his college education because of its prestige in the area, not because of its religious affiliation.

Arelis's maternal grandparents contrasted in their educational background. Maria explains, "On my mother's side, the story is a bit different. My grandparents barely finished middle school, however, my grandfather became a very successful businessman. You could tell the differences between both sides of the family; my mother's side could have had money, but did not have a lot of cultural knowledge, while my father's side, it was vice-versa." Unlike many of her classmates, Arelis does not come from "old" Dominican wealth. She places great significance on the value of an education and the respect and financial security it can provide.

It was out of this deep value on education that Arelis's parents decided to make the investment to send their children to the best school in the area: a private, American school that would teach their children English, and eventually allow them to graduate with a dual-diploma, having met the graduation requirements for both the Dominican

Republic Ministry of Education and the United States accrediting agency for SMCS.

Arelis began her educational journey at SMCS at the age of three with some of her original classmates she received her high school diploma in 2009.

Reflecting on her years at school, she responds, “I loved SMCS. I loved that we had smaller classes, making bonds and friendships stronger. Because of the size, we also had better connections with our teachers. My favorite teachers were the ones that always challenged me, gave me a hard time, made me think outside the box and get out of my comfort zone.” She goes on to talk about how she discovered her passion for science and a desire to follow in her parents’ footsteps with a career in medicine. “ My fourth grade teacher, Ms Kern, was the first to challenge me. For a science fair I wanted to do something related to the human body and she told me, ‘Well, why don’t you dissect a frog and see how it compares and contrasts with the human body.’ So there I was, as a fourth grader, dissecting my first frog...and there I found the passion in my life: cutting things open, blood, organs, and a challenge!” From there, Arelis continues to expand, her voice rising with excitement and obvious satisfaction at her accomplishments. “Since I was a small child, in grade school, I heard the stories of how Mr. Boyd was the hardest teacher alive, how students failed by the dozen, and how he kept their brains in jars on his desk. However, when I took his classes, especially Advanced Science, I took every challenge and every project like a bull by the horns.” Arelis pauses, and continues,

His class was decisive in me choosing to study medicine in college.

During Advanced Science, he assigned numerous dissections throughout the year, and I felt like I had gotten home every time I stepped into his classroom. I spent

hours dissecting, stayed after school poking at a cow's heart, did outside research for fish dissections, and even took a shark home so that I could take out its inner-ear. The shark project was my favorite project all throughout high school, not because of the 150 extra points to be earned, but for the value it had to the teacher and the students. I spent two days trying to locate and successfully take out a shark's inner ear, which is extremely hard. No one had been able to do it for years and I was able to do it. And as Mr. Boyd watched me work and slave over those dissections, he finally told me, 'Doesn't that tell you something about your future?'

With that Arelis pauses and beams with satisfaction. We continue to discuss her educational journey and she circles back to her previous discussion about education and learning. "My grandfather used to say that education can bring both knowledge and wealth, but that with wealth alone and no education, knowledge could never be achieved."

Arelis also placed great emphasis in putting her knowledge into application through her extra-curricular activities. While others in the school would think her most proud to be a star on the soccer field or the basketball court (and she was both), Arelis's greatest passion was participating in Model United Nations.

I dedicated more time to model United Nations when it was going on than to school and homework. I loved debating, fighting for even the smallest clause in a resolution just so that the country I was representing got what it wanted. The proudest moment 'til now in my life has been to win an award in one of those

conferences. And even though I study medicine currently, my United Nations days are far from over.

When asked about how education in her private school compared to an education in the United States, or to the Dominican system, Arelis responds, “ I don’t have any other experiences to compare with since I didn’t leave SMCS or go to study in the United States, however, I do see a difference between my education and the Dominican (public) educational system.” She goes on to explain that not only in public school, but also in her private university that “ since we live in a third-world country, things are taught, let’s say, in the mathematical and scientific departments without the help of calculators and computer programs which are used more in developed countries; teaching is rawer, relying more on oneself, instead of upon technology.” When I ask her how this relying more on oneself will affect her training in medical school, she is quick to point out that the private hospital in town is very technologically advanced and that, unlike her parents, “I think I’ll go to med-school in the U.S. I really want to go to the University of Michigan and my parents wouldn’t let me go for college, but maybe for med-school.”

How well I remember the long conversations Arelis and I shared during her junior and senior year while she was begging her parents to allow her to go to college in the United States. Her parents feared that if she moved to the United States at such a young age, she would be too impressionable and would transform herself into the likeness of a *dominicanyork*, not maintaining her respectable island upbringing and morals. They openly shared with Arelis and with me, that if she chose to study in the U.S. after college,

that would be acceptable, but by then, she would be even more firmly grounded as a respectable Dominican woman.

This assertion that there is a vast difference between the morals and behaviors of transnationals compared to those who have always lived on the island made me wonder what Arelis's own opinions were about the differences among her peers—especially the differences between those who she classifies as “Dominicanyorks” compared to those who are “constant citizens.” Arelis uses this term “constant citizens” to refer to Dominicans who have lived on the island without transnational movement except for short vacations.

These Dominicans who travel back and forth do differ from those who are always here. Sometimes they tend to be less educated, and a loud personification of the clash of two countries. The bad perception given to transnational Dominicans is not always the case however. There are many types of these transnationals, the true *dominicanyorks* who go to New York to look for a better life, job, and future for their family; and those who are middle class or wealthy and go back and forth to study.

Arelis explains that it is easy to identify the [real] *dominicanyorks* by simply observing their dress code. “The big shirts, the caps, the Jordan’s, are just a way of them describing the clash of cultures they have. It’s like a mix of *bachata* with rap and R&B.”

Arelis also draws a clear line between *dominicanyorks* who have an education and those who do not. Some of her peers at SMCS may not have had parents who were formally educated beyond the Dominican public school system, but their parents had

obviously created wealth for themselves in order to pay the highest tuition rates in the city. (There were very few scholarship students) However, Arelis shares that many of the families with which her family socializes look down at these *dominicanyorks* and disapprove of the type of influence *dominicanyork* peers may have on their children. “When some ‘high class’ [parts] of Dominican society see the *dominicanyork* sense of style and their way of earning a living, they are socially condemned as destroying the Dominican youth with gambling, bad taste in music, and drug abuse.” She shrugs off these opinions. “Though it may be the case for some *dominicanyorks*, it’s not the same for all of them and they are discriminated against just for expressing their individual likes and tastes.”

Those “constant citizens” or “real Dominicans” Arelis describes as “being able to take the whole package as it comes, without leaving out any flaw, without acknowledging every strength in its culture. What makes a Dominican authentic is being able to recognize the poor position the country has, the severity of its decaying economy, the corruption that surrounds the government, but still being able to see the hospitality of its people, the sincerity and respect, the value of family, the beautiful natural things that embody what this island is all about. Dominican culture is beautiful, personified in a tricolor flag that says God, Patriotism, and Liberty. The Dominican is a hardworking and proud individual, who loves where he comes from, and fights his way to where he is going.”

Arelis believes that she personifies this “authentic Dominican.”

When it comes to most clearly defining her own identity, it is steeped not only in culture, but also in language and its relation to cultural identity.

Even though I'm Dominican and my native language is Spanish, and I speak Spanish 95% of my day now that I am in college, I do prefer English. I believe I'm fluent in both, speak them both nearly perfectly, as well as in writing, making me bilingual, however, I love English. Since I read more in English than I do in Spanish, I know more eloquent and difficult words in English than I do in Spanish. I do now attend a Spanish-speaking college, and I have been forced to read more Spanish novels, thus enhancing my vocabulary. I think both cultures and languages identify me, quite perfectly, honestly. I am a clash of many cultures, not only Dominican and American, but many others as well, I am culturally part European, specifically Spanish, because of my heritage, background, and because it is where my parents both went to school.

Arelis's identifies herself as a "constant citizen" of the Dominican Republic, which establishes that she recognizes the presence of non-constant citizens who, still plays a role in Dominican culture and society. Throughout our discussion, she identified the complex strata of Dominican society with "traditional" Dominican families who come from great wealth, "constant" Dominicans (like her parents) who are self-made and have created wealth. Both these groups separate themselves socially from wealthy educated *dominicanyorks*. There is also a great divide between uneducated, poor "constant" Dominican citizens, and uneducated middle-class *dominicanyorks*. What binds the "constant" citizens, wealthy or poor, is their consistent tie to the island. What separate

the *dominicanyorks*, is their constant movement, American slang, and styles of clothing. However, what also binds uneducated poor on the island together with transnational Dominicans is the likelihood of transnational financial support that issues from transnationals living in the U.S. to their poorer families living on the island. Arelis, unlike her parents' and grandparents' generations, not only sees the differences between 'yorks' and Dominicans, but clearly explains that she tries to take each person for who he or she is as one expressing his or her "style or tastes," and insists that she will not discriminate simply because of status or transnational background.

Arelis's identity has also been shaped by her parent's emphasis on education. As individuals who came from middle-class families themselves, Arelis's physician parents' message to her and her brother is that maintenance of their status and wealth will be dependent on their acquisition of education and the realization of great ambition. As I was deeply in the midst of this writing, I received a frantic message with the subject line "SOS" from Arelis, begging me to set up a "Skype session" soon because she had "tanked Chemistry" and was having a crisis about knowing what her "career" [major] should be. In her second semester of college, she confessed that she was feeling the pressure. "My parents' expectations were really getting to me...like I totally blanked on a Chem. exam that I had really studied hard for...total BLANK." Arelis's fear of her own failure and the fear of failing her parents haunts her. She determined that she would continue to pursue her course toward medicine, following in her parents' footsteps. "I decided that med is what I really want, but I'm scared crapless by not being able to succeed in it. I felt more secure in law, like I already know I'll rock at it. But I guess one

always fears the unknown. So I'm still going to go after medicine until the next breakdown." Arelis's identity has been forged in pursuit of educational achievement and financial security.

Part II: Analysis

Arelis represents a "self-made" Dominican family who has remained on the island. She does not come from the "old wealth" on the island, but through education and the establishment is a second-generation member of a growing professional class in the Dominican Republic. Her family has risen to an upper-middle-class status. Her story is not unusual, but instead is representative of other families who have climbed the socio-economic ladder in a Dominican society that has developed greatly through the reign of Trujillo and since. Her family has acquired wealth and reputation as a result of their education, prestigious kind of work, wise financial management, and association.

Arelis and her brother attended the most prestigious private school in the city and graduated with a dual-accredited education. Her perceptions of schooling the differences between private and public education on the island have no basis on personal experience, but her perceptions about private vs. public education in the Dominican Republic is interesting. Even now, she attends a private Jesuit university because of its prestige, instead of the local public college.

Her classmates both at SMCS and in university included the heirs to Dominican political and business dynasties. As (in her words) a "constant citizen," Arelis was accepted into the social realm of other Dominicans whose families had never left the

island. Arelis's closest circle of friends was made up entirely of these students whose families had never left the island. Those who shared a similar background to Arelis also shared two prominent characteristics: a deep pride in being wholly Dominican and an emphasis on education and future success in white-collar professions.

Yet, Arelis also had classmates whose families who had left the island in pursuit of an American dream that they could make transportable back to the island. With these classmates, she shared the same deep pride of Dominican heritage, but she also acknowledges a "difference" between transnationals and those who had not left the island, both externally and socially. She admits that socially, she has been discouraged from socializing with *dominicanyorks* with their American slang, music, and poor reputations, even those at SMCS.

Xáe Reyes describes this phenomenon of insider vs. outsider in her study of transnational Puerto Rican students who return to the island as those "seldom viewed by Island residents as 'real' Puerto Ricans. If they show evidence of U.S. customs and English language use, they are called *bilingues*, 'Neo-Ricans' or 'Newyorkians,' and they are often rejected by the greater Puerto Rican community" (Reyes, 2000, p. 42). 'Yorks' are the Dominican equivalents of this same phenomenon.

Even with recognizing this same separation and (sometimes rejection) of transnational students upon their return to the island, Arelis tried to disassociate from that reality, claiming that she "will not discriminate simply because of status or transnational background." She also attempted to separate those *dominicanyorks* who have education from those who do not as a marker of whether or not they are positive to Dominican

culture on the island or detract from the norms of Dominican culture. Arelis may not try to show discrimination in overt ways, but her family association and her own peer group identifications reflect this separation of the transnational class from those whose upward social mobility has been accomplished entirely on the Island.

Part III: Teacher Reflections

Arelis, representative of a Dominican student whose life has always been lived on the island, shares a perspective that I'm not even sure she would recognize in herself, especially when relating to her transnational peers that she labels *dominicanyorks*. She touches on the negative reputation *dominicanyorks* have on the island when she talks about her parents' fears in sending her to Michigan for college, and then again when describing especially those transnational Dominicans who do not have education and who may "be destroying Dominican youth with gambling, bad taste in music, and drug abuse." Although she separates herself from "those" who may have such opinions, I find it interesting that the main aspect that separates transnational Dominicans in Arelis's mind as to whether or not they have negative influence on Dominican culture on the island is education. I know well, how school accomplishment is a central value within Arelis's family, and since she does not come from a Dominican dynasty and is "self-made," I can see how others who have acquired education and are also "self-made" but transnationals would be different according to her own family perceptions.

I also find Arelis's terminology "constant citizen" as intriguing as well as it is awkward. It makes me wonder if being a "constant citizen" infers greater ownership of

the country to which one belongs or of which one is a citizen as compared to those who are not constantly in residence on the island. I find this idea especially interesting when contrasting her term “constant citizen” with her definition of Dominican culture. She describes an authentic Dominican as “being able to recognize the poor position the country has, the severity of its decaying economy, the corruption that surrounds the government, but still being able to see the hospitality of its people, the sincerity and respect, the value of family, the beautiful natural things that embody what this island is all about...” She defines the embodiment of Dominican culture in reference to a “real” or “constant” or authentic Dominican,” but none of the attributes overtly relates to length of time spent on the island.

I see how Arelis, while she considers herself as an “authentic Dominican,” has been influenced by her American-school education on the island. Unlike most Dominicans who have spent their entire lives on the island, Arelis prefers English. She feels comfortable in both Spanish and English, but since she has been studying in English from the age of three and most of her formal reading and writing training was done in English, she prefers a language that is not her native tongue. I also see the influence of her American teachers in her desire to attend university or medical school in Michigan. Many of the teachers at SMCS were originally from the Midwest and most from Michigan. Instead of looking at schools in New York, Boston, or Miami, like most of her national peers, Arelis’s influence from SMCS teachers was evident in her desire to move to Ann Arbor.

I look forward to seeing the path of Arelis's future. Maybe she will even spend a semester living in Nebraska on a student-exchange from her Jesuit university on the island! Will she create her own transnational story as she pursues medical school? Will she continue to prefer English? Will she continue to draw distinctions between herself as a "constant citizen" if she goes away to medical school (a one-time movement while others are in constant transnational movement)? At this point in her life, Arelis's story is representative of one whose family has remained on the island. She has never lived anywhere but the Dominican Republic and she socially most fits in with those whose families have also always lived on the island.

Jonathan

Part I: Narrative

Like Arelis, Jonathan's and his twin brother Jordan's reputations preceded them through their cousin Nicole. Unlike her—she was, one of my top eighth grade students at SMCS—as sixth graders, they were known for being the biggest troublemakers in the middle school, quite the accomplishment, considering they were among the youngest cohort in the three-grade middle school on the larger Pre-school through 12th grade campus. Also unlike Nicole, they were not known for their academic prowess. They were, however, notorious for their clever pranks and ingenious methods of getting themselves out of scrapes. Like twin Tom Sawyers, they managed to charm their way out of any task and earned great popularity among their classmates.

Jonathan and Jordan were born in New York and spent most of their education moving back and forth between Manhattan and the island. Their family history embodies the story of the *dominicanyork* tradition that Arelis discussed. Jonathan shared that,

My grandparents and their parents all came from the same *campo* [rural region] and all were raised together. In that same *campo*, they all knew each other, which is probably the reason that my parents became husband and wife—they were third cousins. The crazy thing is, that in that time the family and a last name was so important that marriage was kept inside the family, which is why there were many second and even first cousins that got married. I am not proud of that, but that is just what was traditional at the time. My dad's dad was a farmer who used to grow and sell tobacco, and my dad's mom was a stay at home wife, since there were seven kids. The family was poor, but very influential in the *campo*. My mom's parents were said to be the richest family in the *campo*. This is because my mom's dad worked and saved worked and saved money from the time he was a little kid and was always able to be a good businessman for himself and his family. This made him very influential in the *campo*. My mom's mother was also a stay at home wife, because she had six kids. One story my mother tells is that their family was the first family in the *campo* to have a television set, and everyone from the *campo* would get together in their house and watch television.

Jonathan moves on to explain how his family's transnational tradition began.

“Since my grandparents were so influential in the *campo*, they were able to get visas for

their kids and they all eventually came to the United States. In my family, all my uncles and aunts and cousins are in the supermarket business. They all know retail and food like the back of their hand, and they always have worked and owned a couple [of supermarkets].” Interestingly enough, Jonathan describes how his grandparents, who worked to become influential in order to provide visas for their children to begin transnational movement during the 1960s, “only came to the United States a couple of times and only for a couple of weeks.” They continued to maintain the family home (with remittance-enabled upgrades) in the *campo* and the boys remember making trips up to the village for family celebrations.

The first time I met Jonathan’s father, I could not help but stare at the exact, but wizened replica of his identical twin tenth-graders. He had flown in from New York for the week and was disappointed that his boys weren’t doing as well in their classes as he had hoped they would. He explained how hard he and his wife were working for the family and that he felt guilty that he could not be on the island more often, but that he felt safer with the boys on the island than he did with them in the schools in New York. He also explained how his wife was terrified of flying and unwilling to come back to live on the island. She refused to travel back anymore, unless it was for a family funeral. He shook his head, shrugged his shoulders, and outlined the plan he had created to provide a “family” in the city for his sons. He had hired the son of a family friend from the *campo*, who was in his late 20s to come in and live with the boys. Jovani was in charge of chaperoning the boys in public, chauffeuring the boys to and from school and social activities, and staying with them at the house. Jonathan’s father had also hired a live-in

maid who did all the cooking and cleaning. With all this care, he simply could not understand why his boys were not being responsible with their schoolwork. He pondered aloud; maybe it was time to take the boys back to New York again for a while to help them realize the privileges they had back on the island. He scanned the guidance counselor and teachers faces for response and then looked down at his hands.

Jonathan acknowledged that his school career was full of transitions and tough situations in new schools.

My educational journey has been extremely long. Although switching back and forth was frustrating at times, I thank God that I went through it because it really opened my mind to new things, and it let me be more aware of how both systems in education work in the Dominican Republic and here in New York. I was born in New York and I attended pre-kindergarten and kindergarten here [in New York]. In first grade, my first school was a disaster because I used to be bullied all the time by my fellow classmates and my teacher. I remember when I was in that school the teacher tried to tell my mother that I was retarded and that I was dyslexic. After that, I went to a new school for the rest of first grade and I loved it because the teacher was a lot nicer and the kids respected me. Then in second grade I moved back to the D.R. and went to second grade at SMCS, and I was also there for third grade. Then I came back to New York and to a new school for fourth grade and half of fifth grade. The other half of fifth grade I went back to SMCS and was also there for 6th grade. Then for seventh grade I came back to New York to a new school and then went back to the D.R. for 9th and 10th grade.

Then for 11th grade I came back to New York to ANOTHER new school and for senior year I went back to SMCS.

When I asked Jonathan what qualities he believed engaged him as a student and made him successful (successful enough to keep advancing at grade level) throughout his various transitions at six different schools he responded, “My favorite teachers growing up had to be the teachers who were understanding and actually took the time to talk to me and to laugh at my good humor. For example, you was [sic] always open to what I had to say and we would always have our laughs, and when it came to work we always did what we had to do.” I nod my head—so true. In my first days teaching the notorious twins, the high school principal had warned me to practice a grim and strict demeanor to let those twins know “who was boss.” Unfortunately, my classroom management has never encompassed such a dictatorial demeanor and it is with chagrin that I remember ‘laying down the law’ with these two. I must have been a pretty good actress despite my position as a novice second-year teacher, because Jonathan grins a wicked grin, “Miss, remember when we thought you were gonna be SO mean? I’m glad you relaxed on us. But I know why you did it. You heard about Mr. Contreras, didn’t you?” (In seventh grade, the twins tormented their science teacher who left the school after one short semester of their wicked ways.)

We transitioned from talking about his rap sheet at SMCS and revisited what eventually made him academically successful despite his moves. He expounded to discuss the types of projects and extra-curricular activities that inspired him. “My favorite projects were hands-on projects, and definitely group projects because I like to lead my

group with finding ideas and organizing information.” We both laugh while reflecting over a certain Julius Caesar presentation he and his group completed his tenth grade year. He was Julius Caesar, complete with toga, in a version set in Jamaica—complete with REALLY poor Jamaican accents. It is true that Jonathan was the mastermind of this great production. He even managed to convince a fellow-student that the performance needed to be recorded and before I knew it, we had a video camera off to one side and a stage cleared at the front of my classroom.

For Jonathan and his brother, SMCS was the most consistent piece of their education. While with nearly every move back to New York the twins had to adjust to a new teachers and classmates, with each return to SMCS, they returned to teachers, peers, and families who knew their history. When given the choice, both decided to return to SMCS to complete their senior year. They were able to share a senior trip, senior banquet, and graduation with peers they have known since first grade, albeit intermittently. However, their in-and-out appearances throughout the years did influence their identify and the way they perceived their fit into the class. Jonathan explains how being a transnational teen sets him apart from his peers who have never lived off the island.

There is a big difference between Dominicans raised in the country, and Dominicans who travel a lot like me. When it comes to kids my age or the social network, most Dominicans raised in the D.R. speak Spanish on most occasions, and even though they know English, they try not to use it, because they can’t really pronounce it. When you come from the U.S. to the Dominican Republic,

we speak English with our friends, but when we with are those Dominicans in the D.R., we try to speak a little bit more Spanish.

Jonathan explains that not only his language, but also his dress, and family background place him in what Arelis called the *dominicanyork* class. Jonathan disagrees with this label, and introduces me to a new term in reference to transnational teens. “The term ‘*dominicanyork*’ is not used with the kids my age, however, we are sometimes called ‘gringo’ or most kids who dress ghetto, or speak it (in an African-American dialect) are called *chopo*.” Jonathan explains that these *chopos* are segregated from traditional Dominican society.

It’s sad to see how the *chopos* are not accepted in the high class of the Dominican Republic, and are looked down on because they listen to different music, dress different, or simply cannot speak proper Spanish. In the regular Dominican crowd, *chopos* are accepted because that is what most Dominicans are over there. They are separated from the high class. *Chopos* have come to call the high-class preppy kids ‘plastics,’ and there is always a division between these two groups. Because of this tension between these classes, I say the Dominican Republic has segregation, and unfortunately it spreads into restaurants, clubs, and even movie theaters. The nicely buttoned down shirts, fitted jeans, and loafers crowd try to hang out more in high-class places and areas where not many *chopos* go; as soon as they see *chopos* going to the area, they evacuate. The sad thing is, most kids who come from the U.S. fall under the *chopo* category, just because they are different and used to different things. Where am I? I consider myself to be in the

middle, because I dress like the plastics and speak like them, but I am very open-minded and speak to everyone.

Regardless of the fact that Jonathan believes he fits in with the “plastics” based on his dress, he has recognized that he does not fit in when it comes to his language.

Well, I prefer the English language because I do speak English more than Spanish. The funny thing is, the reason why I always speak Spanish is because in my house I always speak Spanish with my parents and maids, but outside the house it’s always English. The times I speak Spanish outside the house is mostly in the Dominican Republic when I’m out socializing in the clubs or with my Dominican friends. I do speak English mostly in school or with my best friends (in the Dominican Republic, and mostly with girls. In school, I would rather speak English because I can communicate with it better. I think language is very close to my identity, because it is the language I use to get through tough situations and allows me to get into my comfort zone. For example, if I go to a party here in New York, and in the court there are mostly Hispanic guys, I start speaking Spanish because it makes me feel closer to them, and more familiar. The same is true when I approach anyone, depending on their race determines how I will speak to them.

Even though Jonathan has lived the majority of his life in New York, he remains connected to his Dominican culture and heritage.

When I think about my country, I think about how friendly most Dominicans are. At the same time, I think about how Dominicans are usually more street-smart

than most people, probably because they are forced to grow up on the streets.

Personally, I love my heritage because it has its own identity, and because it has a mark on how people of their culture live their lives. Beliefs and stories are always passed down, and there is something about our culture that is special, and heartfelt. Of course, there are also a lot of bad things about our culture, hustlers, criminals, and segregation among classes. Many high-class people tend to look down on the middle class, and there is a certain 'handbook' you must follow in order to become a 'socially acceptable' person. If I had to sum up what being Dominican is all about, I'd say that it's about family, religion, struggle, and definitely culture. However, in my opinion, from what I've seen here in the States, people will call you Dominican if you speak Spanish, mention *platanos*, listen to *reggaeton*, and have a Dominican flag on your car or house. I think it's unfortunate that it's what most kids my age do; it's how they want to be seen or recognized.

Jonathan's identity has been knitted by his transitions. He recognizes the integration of his Dominican and American cultures. He defines himself as "in the middle," one who does not fit in completely with Dominicans who have spent their entire lives on the island, but also not fitting the profile of the *chopos* who are alienated from higher-class Dominican society because of their style and inability to speak "proper Spanish." He stated that, depending on the situation, he would, leverage his language use to fit in with the individual or the group. He also would adapt his style of dress to fit his location. On the island, he trades his slang, sagging jeans, Jerseys, and Jordans for fitted

jeans, leather loafers, and buttoned-down shirts. The earring is put away. Even when in the United States, however, he attempts to separate himself from the “typical” *dominicanyorks* for whom Dominican culture is about what is symbolic—“Spanish, *platanos*, listening to *reggaeton*, and having a Dominican flag displayed,” prominently. Jonathan describes his own connection to Dominican culture embedded within. “It’s about family, religion, struggle.”

Part II: Analysis

Jonathan’s transnational story is similar to the thousands of stories of migration throughout history. His parents’ movement was initiated for greater wealth and opportunity. Joanna Dreby discusses this migration pattern within the scope of transnational behavior in the introduction to her study on Mexican immigrant families. She explains that, “Transnational families are not new; international separations were also common in earlier periods. Yet today, the pattern is most common among those moving from less wealthy to more prosperous nations” (Dreby 2010, p. 5). Jonathan’s grandparents’ leveraged their relative status in the *campo* to secure visas for their children. His parents, neither of whom graduated from high school on the island, worked their way up in the supermarket business in New York, eventually owning their own *bodega* and consistently sending remittances home to their parents whose status only continued to grow in the *campo* as they finished their home and made rare visits to the United States.

Jonathan's transnational history has also shaped his educational experience. Through his educational career to the time of our most recent interview, Jonathan made eight different transitions, piecing together years in New York and other years back on the island. When returning to New York, Jonathan often began anew at a different school, but while back in the Dominican Republic, Jonathan rejoined his class at SMCS. Jonathan did have the advantage of returning to an American school on the island, so unlike other transnational students, the curriculum scope and sequence was more consistent with what his educational experience had been in the U.S.

Even with the consistency of returning to an American school in the Dominican Republic, the strain of transition was obvious in both Jonathan and his twin's behavior and academics. In school, the twins were known for their pranks and acting as if they did not care about their schoolwork or their teachers. Outside of school, especially while in high school, they were known for their partying and long evenings out on the town. Dreby (2010) also describes similar acting-out in other transmigrant children who have been "left behind" by transnational parents. Jonathan and Jordan had been left in the care of a family employee who was from the same *pueblo* in the *campo* where the twins' grandparents still lived.

Dreby describes similar acting out behaviors of a couple boys, Germán, whose parents had left them in Mexico in the care of family members. Germán's teacher "described him as being extremely popular with the girls, quite a flirt, and also a bit uncontrollable in the classroom" (Dreby, 2010, p. 47). Other teachers and school personnel describe similar frustrations with children of migrants and how their behavior

affects their performance at school. “Regional schoolteachers complained of behavioral problems among children of U.S. migrants. When asked about how migration affected their schools, the most frequent response was discipline problems” (Dreby, 2010, p. 129).

Like Germán and the other students mentioned by schoolteachers in Dreby’s account, Jonathan always had a circle of girls around him and had also developed a reputation as a troublemaker at school. Psychologically, Dreby explains that, “Children of migrant parents may ‘act out’ for several reasons. In most cases, while parents are away, children feel that no one cares about what they are doing. Although most have concerned caregivers and parents, during adolescence children of migrants want to feel accountable to their parents. Physical separation prevents this” (Dreby, 2010, p. 127).

Jonathan certainly missed having his parents’ involvement in his daily life when he attended SMCS. Every time his father made the journey from New York, Jonathan’s seeming careless attitude toward school and acting out was difficult for Mr. Alvarez to understand. Like the parents in Dreby’s study, “children’s schooling is central to parents’ sacrifices. Parents hope their economic support from the United States will give their children the opportunity to have a good education in Mexico and not have the same economic difficulties as an adult that they have had” (Dreby, 2010, p. 16). Mr. Alvarez believed that placing his sons in the care of a family employee on the island, so that his sons could receive a prestigious private school education was a sacrifice necessary to give his son’s more opportunity than he had experienced without a complete education. In his opinion, the accessible educational opportunities in New York were inferior to the private schooling he could offer his sons back on the island. Whether this was true or not,

based upon the negative experiences he felt Jonathan had in primary school in New York, Mr. Alvarez continued to move his sons back to the island when he had saved the resources necessary to give his children every advantage and status while on the island.

While Jonathan loved being with his parents in New York and often complained of missing Quizno's sandwiches and Dunkin' Doughnuts, he actually preferred school at SMCS where class sizes were smaller and he felt teachers got to know him and his story personally. Jonathan indicated that having teachers who took the time to show their care and who set expectations helped him overcome the transitions with success. He also mentioned that extra-curricular activities brought a consistency to his life; he could play on the basketball team in the U.S, just as he did at SMCS. At least at a rhetoric level, Jonathan also placed a high value on education, but because of the great emphasis his parents placed on his educational success.

Angela Valenzuela (1999), in her study of Mexican students in a U.S. public high school points out the importance of "authentic caring" from teachers in relation to student personal and academic success

[A]uthentically caring teachers are seized by their students and energy flows toward their projects and needs. The benefit of such profound relatedness for the student is the development of a sense of competence and mastery over worldly tasks. In the absence of such connectedness, students are not only reduced to the level of objects, they may also be diverted from learning the skills necessary for mastering their academic and social environment"(Valenzuela, 1999, pp. 61-62).

Jonathan specifically pointed to this same quality of “caring” and its bearing on his personal success.

I saw a great evolution in Jonathan from his freshman year to his senior year. He matured and his focus on education became more precise. He did not lose his humor or his mischief, but he understood more clearly how to accomplish academic success using his engaging personality to his advantage. By the time he completed his senior year (and this study ended) his GPA and SAT scores position him to go to university in New York.

Throughout his growing up, Jonathan learned to recalibrate his comportment based upon his flexible identity as one who had spent time in the United States, but also felt himself to be fully Dominican. Even though Arelis specifically mentioned Jordan, Jonathan’s twin as possessing traits that would make him *dominicanyork*, Jonathan separates himself from that term, as well as from what he says is the teen-equivalent of that label: *chopo*. He states that individuals who fall into the category of *chopo* or *dominicanyork* are rejected by Dominican society at large on the island. Even though, as he explains “most kids” who come from the United States fall into such a category, he disassociates from such categorization. Conversely, he relates that he also does not quite fit into the category of Dominicans who have remained on the island and their preppy “plastic” style. He attempts to forge his identity as something that is “in the middle.”

Reyes, in her study of return migrants to Puerto Rico, observed this same practice that “Student’s self-reported identities were not consistent with their identities as perceived by others” (Reyes, 2000, p. 54). What it seems Jonathan was attempting to do, was to adapt his own identity markers depending on his circumstances, adapting more of

a “plastic” style of dressing and speaking while on the island, and positioning himself as American when he is off the island. He may feel as if he is successful in “blending in” with the identity he wants to assume, but like Reyes’s findings, one wonders at how those around him perceive his identity.

Jonathan uses language and dress to manipulate his identity. Bailey describes similar positioning, stating that, “The ability to speak varieties of both English and Spanish allows Dominican Americans to align themselves situationally with members of diverse social categories, but also differentiates them from individuals who are not Dominican AND American” (Bailey, 2000, p. 563). Jonathan discusses his ability to switch from English and Spanish according to situation, just as he switches his dress code depending on where he is.

Becker describes the ease in which the Portuguese students in her study manipulated their identities “to avoid cognitive dissonance or to move between different social fields and assume roles in each without producing stress or disorientation” (Becker, 1990, p. 49). Jonathan manipulates his language and external identity characteristics in order to fit into what he categorizes as “the middle,” thus allowing him (in his mind) to socialize with “plastics—“ those who have lived on the island their entire lives.

Glick-Schiller also describes this ability of transnationals to adapt according to situation. “Within their complex web of social relations, transmigrants draw upon and create fluid and multiple identities grounded in their society of origin and in the host societies. While some migrants identify more with one society than the other, the

majority maintain several identities that link them simultaneously to more than one nation” (Glick-Schiller, 2006, p. 11).

At the completion of this study, Jonathan believed that his transnational reality would continue throughout college and his career. He was spending his summers on the island, surrounded by the same friends he had at SMCS, and he studied at a university in New York, where he surrounded himself with transnationals like himself. Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández have said of transnational Dominicans,

One of the most obvious results of the immigrant experience for Dominicans is that the space of their physical and existential mobility increases tremendously. Their living space after migration encompasses both the native country and the North American mainland. They can now have a larger mental habitat within which to configure their human identity. Their ampler sphere of experience entails an ability to harmonize English with Spanish, snowstorms with tropical rains, and *merengue* with rock or rap, to cite only a few divergent images. But it also entails the possibility of creating alternative models by rearranging the existing ones (1998, p. 146).

Jonathan continues to exist in this transnational space and grapples with his identity and language in each country that he considers home.

Part III: Teacher’s Reflections

My vision of the twins is that they were clever, ornery, and misunderstood. I look back with chagrin when I think of the “tough teacher” persona I attempted to assume in

the early days of our time in the classroom together. I feel like what made my relationship with Jonathan successful for his classroom experience and his academic progress was a balance of clear expectations, individualized projects, and an abundance of care. Without knowing how closely it would knit our class together, I initiated a journal writing routine and gave students opportunities to share their thoughts after writing. It was through this, at first, that I began to really get to know Jonathan, his humor, his personality, and his dreams. It isn't that there weren't moments when he was a little too flirty and chatty with the girls around him, or when he elected to put forth little effort instead of rising to his potential, but soon, I was able to call him out with sarcasm and Jonathan would rise to the challenge with a sideways grin plastered on his face.

In one of my interviews with Jonathan, we were both back on the island for a graduation at SMCS. He was there to visit friends, just as I was there to celebrate with former students. We sat in the noisy food court at a local plaza and over coffee, chatted about his growing up. Britney Spears music blared from the arcade around the corner and the smell of Burger King and Kentucky Fried Chicken surrounded us. It was in this atmosphere, artificially American, but on the island, that Jonathan kept referring to life in New York as "here," when in reality it was "there." It made me wonder, whether Jonathan's "here" and "there" were always mixed up in his mind or whether his use of 'here' was an unconscious reference to our shared 'American' reality, even though we were on the Island. How did he clearly distinguish one from the other with such consistent commutes back and forth?

On that day, he wore a pair of jeans, leather loafers, and an oversized polo, not exactly the uniform of those he would call “plastic,” but pretty close. The oversized shirt and the off-kilter black Yankees hat would tip anyone on the island off that he was not quite “plastic.” In his discussion of himself as a transnational student (my words, not his) he very clearly rejected any association with the label *dominicanyork* or *chopo*. His appearance and his mix of American slang made me wonder how others would label him. It was even more interesting later, when in my interview with Arelis, she very specifically pointed to Jonathan’s twin as an example of one of the *dominicanyorks*. When I reflect back on the twins’ closest circle of friends at school and outside in their social circle, the vast majority were also transnationals or children of transnational parents. I can think of only one of their closest friends whose family had never lived off the island. This made me wonder even more if there had been cliques or social groups within my classroom that I had not really noticed before. My guess is that Jonathan’s clear rejecting of any transnational labels was because of the rejection or prejudice he perceived if he were in fact labeled as such.

Just as Jonathan rejects the stratification of Dominican society and its hierarchical nature, with “the high-class looking down on the middle class and... ‘handbook’ to become a ‘socially acceptable person,’” he also rejects what he sees Dominican-American teens doing in New York to position themselves as Dominican with their “Dominican flags.” On either side of the transnational space, Jonathan, it appears, wants to fit “in the middle.” He exists in a transnational space and wants identities that connect to either place, but is within that transnational space as well.

Jonathan represents the story of the transnational student. He manipulates his identity and language to fit into each situation he encounters. He is fully Dominican in his own mind, just as he fits clearly into life in New York. His parents have sacrificed much and have worked diligently to provide a life for their sons that will give them greater advantages in life than what they could obtain. Jonathan is a second generation transnational who views his future as continuing to inhabit two places.

Rosa

Part I: Narrative

Rosa's family moved to the Dominican Republic when she was a sophomore in high school. I met her for the first time when my principal brought her family through my classroom to introduce them. Rosa seemed cool, calm, and sophisticated while her brother, a freshman, looked terrified. I didn't know until months later that they were both terrified, having left the private schools of New Jersey behind so that their parents could give them a better life back on the island.

Rosa's parents immigrated to the United States in 1989, before her birth in 1990. Two of Rosa's grandparents finished high school and all of them worked in the service industry. Rosa's parents did not attend college, Rosa's dad, because he felt he was earning good money at a young age; and her mother, because she "did not have the resources to go to college and money was hard to come by." Rosa describes how her

parents lived their American dream and worked to provide greater opportunity for their children.

My parents began to work in New York, in the Bronx as cashiers in a supermarket. When I was two and my brother was born, my parents decided to move to New Jersey where they became owners of a mini-market there. At that time the economy was growing and it pushed my family forward into a better lifestyle in New Jersey. It was pleasant compared to the rough city of New York. When my parents had my little sister when I was in middle school, my father decided to get into the lottery business back in the Dominican Republic. The main reason for moving to the U.S. in the first place, and the most important reason was to offer their children a better life and education. They believed this was possible by going to a new place in search of new ways to maintain their future family, just like anyone.

Unlike my other students, Rosa came into SMCS as a virtual outsider. She had attended private Catholic schools on scholarship her entire life. It was a major transition for her and her brother. In her words, “I found the change completely drastic!” At first, her collected exterior seemed aloof to other students. It was challenging to watch her face the struggle of finding her niche in the small school.

Everything was different, completely and literally mind-boggling! I mean, I thought that the education system in the U.S. was great, but I felt that here, at least at SMCS, there was more competition and it motivated me to do even better in school than I had been previously doing. Aside from that, I was one of like 50

instead of 1 in 250 in my old school. The teachers were able to dedicate more time to each student as an individual, sometimes making a course more intense because they actually had time to read every student's paper. I was scared when I moved because I had never lived outside of the U.S. and at first, I found it difficult to adjust to everything and it even affected my grades. I was really depressed, looking back now, but I think I've honestly learned how to embrace change and learned that friends come and go and the ones who are willing to stick around are the ones worth talking to. I did feel like that people in the D.R. had less drama than in my former high school where we really had the cliques, the jocks, and the popular people. In SMCS it just didn't seem to matter so that really relieved a lot of peer pressure for me.

When it came to comparing the overall educational systems in the U.S. and the Dominican, Rosa comments that,

I didn't find either of the systems very different. I felt like SMCS was a little weak in math, but other than that it was the same, but then I felt like the difficulty at SMCS was a little higher because we were in such small classes. It really is true that you learn better in small groups. If you had asked me like two or three years ago about whether I'd rather be in school in the Dominican Republic or in the U.S., I'd have said the States, but now, I think I'm fine. I've gotten a good education either place.

When asked to clarify about how teachers have helped to support her educational journey, she mentioned teachers who challenged and pushed her, but also those who genuinely cared about her success.

It seems like the harder the teacher was, the more motivated I was to get an A. I feel like the more teachers communicate with their students and push them just enough, it really makes all the difference. I felt that in SMCS the teachers really cared about your success; it felt like there, you couldn't get lost and that no matter what, I could do great. I think the point is communication is the key—along with sincerity from teachers.

One of Rosa's biggest challenges, besides adjusting to a new school environment, was to use her Spanish in a new capacity. While she learned Spanish from her native Spanish-speaking parents, she considers her first language English and had never attended school in Spanish. "I definitely, without a doubt, consider English my native language. It's just easier for me to communicate and even express myself in English. But I do consider myself bilingual, or even more than that—I mean, I speak French and a bit of sign language; enough to defend myself!"

After graduation in 2009, Rosa took on a new challenge when she enrolled in the local private college, which enabled her to continue to live with her parents and younger siblings. All her courses there were conducted in Spanish and her reading materials were available to students in Spanish too. She was pushed to develop more of an academic Spanish vocabulary. "Now, actually studying in college, after studying in English my whole life, I have found that I have no preference (about which language in which I

would prefer to study.) I'm motivated to do what I have to do to push myself forward and better myself. Of course, English will always be easier, but I enjoy a challenge!"

Rosa's long-term plans include moving back to the United States and working for an international company. I asked her how her living in two cultures and studying in two languages and systems have influenced her identity, she seemed stumped at first.

Wow, this is a really tough concept! I mean, if I speak Spanish, I follow Dominican culture and if I speak English, I follow American culture. I've never really considered myself Dominican; Dominican-American, yes, but purely Dominican? Wow, such a weird concept to me! I mean, if I go by the stereotypes, then a Dominican is a loud, friendly person who has a brownish complexion. We also have really 'macho' men, for lack of a better word. Our culture is very integrated in the Catholic religion, and I think that shows up in people's beliefs about gay marriage and abortion; we are still very conservative. We are missing a strong government and so we're a culture that some may consider lazy and that loves to party.

Even after completing her answer, she apologized about how embarrassed she was at not being able to really define herself by language or by culture on her own, without relying only on the stereotypes.

She did not seem to feel this same sense of tension when describing the differences between a Dominican who has always lived on the island compared to one who has moved back and forth to the United States.

Is there a difference? YES! A HUGE difference! Wow, well, again, this can me VERY stereotypical, but here goes: Dominicans who live in the DR are categorized into two kinds. You have the ‘plastics’ and the ‘yos’ [short for *dominicanyork*]. The ‘plastics’ are more refined and educated people of the society while the ‘yos’ are the people who are from the hood and they are often considered ignorant people that speak a very choppy Spanish. Also, their clothing style is what really makes them different. The ‘plastics’ use the finest brands, what some would consider to be couture, while the ‘yos’ will wear sneakers, tanks, and jeans, and look sloppy. Yeah, so that’s just here on the island. Now, when you mark the ones that are from New York and come to the DR, they are ‘yos,’ but more likely to change and refine their style in clothing to adapt to the ‘plastic’ way of dressing since they are actually well-educated because of living under the U.S. government rules (that students, by law, must attend school). Now cultural difference also comes down to the taste in music and how *dominicanyorks* will listen to hip hop and some merengue, but mainly English music, while people here listen to *reggaeton* and other styles of music. But in the D.R., it’s a huge rift between the culture and it’s really just from the lack of a fair government. The law of the land, seriously, is if you have your own money, you OWN the D.R. So that’s why some people leave the D.R. to go to the U.S. to work and come back and live like kings or queens. It’s the truth and it is amazing how you see it. I try not to discriminate and buy into the whole ‘hood’ and ‘plastic’ thing, but it’s very difficult. Even so, I still talk to everyone because you

can't judge a person by where he or she comes from or how they dress. Those things change, like fashion does and I've honestly learned that it's what's inside that counts because even most 'plastics' in the D.R. can end up being the biggest jerk, while the person dressed as a 'yo' could be a friend for life. It's all just very superficial.

Part II: Analysis

Unlike Arelis's or Jonathan's expressions of identity, Rosa thinks of herself as primarily American and maybe American-Dominican. She describes two separate groups, 'plastics' and 'yos,' but does not claim identification with either group. Rather, she takes on the perspective of an outsider, thinking of herself as a temporary citizen of Dominican life, but knowing that her future will be back in her "home" country—the United States. This is in contrast to how her parents view their life on the island.

Like Jonathan's parents, Rosa's parents lived a transnational reality, leaving the island to pursue the American Dream. They left the island with little, and throughout their time in the United States, they brought their children for visits throughout their childhood so that they could maintain a connection to the homeland. It was never their intent to stay in the United States, and finally when they saved enough money to purchase a business back on the island, they returned to the island with the hope that the move would be permanent and that their children would deepen Dominican roots that would decrease the likelihood of their return to the U.S. as transnationals.

Rosa's perspective on Dominicans that move to and from the United States or 'yos,' as she identified them, contrasted with Jonathan's. Rosa recognized that some 'yos' "adapt to the 'plastic' way of dressing..." in order to fit in while on the island. While Jonathan would not identify himself as a *dominicanyork*, Rosa's definition would classify him as one—but under a special sub-group classification. Jonathan would fit as the *dominicanyork* who comes from a background of money and education. Like Jonathan, however, Rosa chose to not classify herself as a *dominicanyork*, but maintained her "outsider" status. Rosa does not maintain her "outsider" status when discussing Dominican culture as separate than the classifications of 'yos' and 'plastics.' When discussing culture, Rosa's pronouns shift to "our," and "we," illustrating that she does recognize a connection to her Dominican culture, but that she struggled with defining it without stereotypes.

Rosa's educational experience has consistently been in private, parochial schools. She did not experience any education outside the U.S. until her sophomore year of high school. When Rosa came to SMCS, she struggled socially, but excelled academically. Xáe Reyes, describes her own struggle fitting into life in Puerto Rico when her family returned to live on the island.

Some of my cousins now looked at my sister and me as if we were from another planet because our Spanish was faltering and our behaviors differed from theirs. In spite of our parents' continued efforts to maintain our language and customs, we were not familiar with many expressions and did not know the right songs, nor did we read the *fotonovelas* that our peers so enjoyed. My sister and I found

comfort in maintaining ties to the U.S. culture we had been immersed in by speaking English with each other while we began to relearn Puerto Rican cultural norms and language nuances. We were fortunate to attend bilingual Catholic schools for the first three years after our arrival (2000, p. 39).

Like Reyes, Rosa struggled to fit in with her new peers socially because even though she wore the same uniform to school, she did not know the norms of Dominican culture and felt most comfortable at first, with her brother and around the (American) SMCS teachers. Also like Reyes, Rosa's academic success was tied to the fact that she was still learning in English and following a curriculum that was very similar to the private school curriculum she had experienced while in the United States. Reyes explains that, "If one has access to private education for one's children...the return migrant experience is less traumatic for the family" (Reyes, 2000, p. 43).

Rosa's main differentiation between school in the States and on the island is the competition and small community that exists at SMCS and the slight weakness in mathematics (Of course, Rosa's experiences were limited to a handful of private schools in the U.S. and SMCS). This could be, as Arelis mentions, a result of the lack of technology at the school. The qualities of teachers that Rosa points out as having a positive influence on her education include teachers who take the time to get to know each of their students as individuals, and who differentiate learning and assessment accordingly. Like Jonathan and Arelis, Rosa again emphasizes the importance of having teachers who challenged her and also cared about her success. She felt that these teachers

made sure that students did not get lost along the way. This was especially important to Rosa as she struggled in her first weeks of adjusting to a new school.

Reyes also commented about how one supportive teacher, Mrs. Noboa, enabled her to “overcome the difficult transition of return migration” (Reyes, 2000, p. 40).

Students like Reyes and like Rosa “may feel marginal; they may feel they are caught between two or more cultures, including the culture of the home, the culture of the school, and the culture of their peers. They may also experience anomie, a sense of rootlessness, over the uncertainty and anxiety engendered by competing norms and beliefs” (Reyes, 2000, p. 44). Rosa was caught in such a blend of cultures and expectations at home, with peers, and at school. Over the course of her first year in the Dominican Republic she learned how to navigate that world.

One skill area that Rosa honed for her navigation of life back on the island was her language. Rosa describes English as her native language; however, over the course of her years living back in the Dominican Republic, she has worked to acquire proficiency in academic Spanish. She chose to stay on the Island for university in order to remain close to her family and to live at home as well as to develop her Spanish language. She claims that she will always prefer to study in English, but that she has “enjoyed the challenge.” Acquiring such proficiency has allowed her to “fit in,” as learns nuances of Dominican Spanish and slang outside the classroom, and is academically successful in the classroom.

Unlike Jonathan who moves with seeming ease in and out of his identity as a Dominican “in the middle,” of being a Dominican and an American, Rosa claims no such

membership. She considers herself a Dominican-American, but not so much in a bicultural sense, but rather in a hybrid culture. Even though her parents did not come from money and acquired their wealth in order to return to the island much like those she describes as able to “OWN the D.R.,” she refuses to identify herself with either the ‘yos’ or the ‘plastics.’ She would prefer to be thought of as an American who has Dominican heritage and who is a temporary resident back on the island and yet, at least for college, she has elected to stay. Rosa represents the transnational story of the transnational who longs to return, who continues to keep strong ties back to the country she considers “home,” even while her parents do everything in their power to root her back on the island where they consider “home,” and where they want her to remain.

Part III: Teacher Reflections

Rosa’s experience as a Dominican-American who did not move to live on the island until well into her teens, was unusual compared to the other transnational students I taught. Like Reyes’ Puerto Rican experience, I think that Rosa’s adjustment to the island was helped because she attended a private school taught in English (and accredited by an American accreditation agency), but that alone did not give her the skills necessary to ease into the social world of the school. I observed the struggle of her first year, but also saw that she made significant strides in the classroom and soon was at the top of her class. Quickly, I believed that the most difficult part of her transition was behind her. Looking back now, I realize that it was another year, or maybe two, before she truly felt a part of her class and accepted into Dominican culture. When we last communicated, she

had a boyfriend, one of my other former students, whose family has never lived off the island. She was doing very well in her university classes and had made a couple visits back to the United States, both on school trips and with family.

In her narration, Rosa claimed that there was greater competition at SMCS than her previous New Jersey parochial schools, and I wonder if that was because she was adjusting to the fact that her teachers were challenging her in different ways and had more time to personally assess her development as a student. She, like Jonathan and Arelis, agreed that teachers who challenged her and sincerely cared about her success made her transition easier, but also made her a stronger student.. I think that she liked that at SMCS, unlike in her private schools in the U.S., that she knew each teacher on a personal level and that it was the norm for students and teachers to interact at school, during lunch, after school, and outside of the school grounds in community events. It is important to remember that Rosa expressed these thoughts about SMCS with one of her former teachers, and that it is at least a possibility that she wanted to speak pleasingly about her experience at SMCS.

When we last spoke, Rosa explained that in the past three years her academic Spanish had grown. She was put into Spanish for native speakers courses at SMCS to ramp up her academic Spanish in preparation of her entrance to university on the island. She also had to pass national exams in Spanish in order to be accepted as a student at the university. I know that she has worked very hard to adapt to being fully bilingual, socially and academically.

Unlike most of her peers at SMCS, when Rosa spoke English she spoke with an East-Coast American accent, without the up and down lilt of a Dominican accent in English. I think that this did separate her distinctly from her peers who had never left the island and more closely aligned her with transnationals like Jonathan. She, however, did not use the same slang, nor did she dress in the “sloppy” style she described as characteristic of ‘yos.’ For Rosa, it was the external appearance and an inability to speak “proper” Spanish that would make her a ‘yo.’ Like Jonathan, she distanced herself from such a label, and yet (also like Jonathan and Arelis) she proclaimed that she would not judge another based on the externals. For Rosa, “It’s what inside that counts.” I wonder if this was a way for her to insulate herself from any discrimination or mistreatment she had felt or witnessed as a return migrant.

It will be interesting to see where Rosa’s story takes her next. As a second generation transnational and US citizen by birthplace (like Jonathan) she did not see herself remaining on the island, but would like to return to a more permanent life in the United States. At this point, because of close connections to parents and limited money, she has remained in the Dominican Republic for her university education. As the years go by, and as she continues to establish her identity on the island, I am curious as to whether Rosa’s plans for her future will remain the same or change. She is part of a familial, multi-generational, the transnational story of return to the homeland with greater wealth and position. Yet she is also a reminder that even within the shared context of family life, different individuals have vastly different experiences. Regardless of whether she

remains in the Dominican Republic, she will most likely she will remain a hybrid of both of her countries.

Julio

Part I: Narration

Unlike Rosa, Julio spent his entire childhood growing up in Santiago. He has photographs from his sister's fifth birthday party surrounded by most of the same students with whom he shared high school classes at SMCS. I met Julio's older sister when she was a sixth grader, and heard stories about Julio from the elementary principal, "You have no idea. This kid is ADHD, ADHD, ADHD." Julio was on my freshman class list and I was excited at the challenge. I had taught Bianca, Julio's older sister and thoroughly enjoyed getting to know her family.

Bianca, a sophomore during Julio's freshman year, was his antithesis. She sat at a table with friends over the lunch hour and more often than not, was completely engrossed in a book. Julio, on the other hand, would be standing on top of the picnic table, on tiptoe arm stretched, drawing on the cafeteria ceiling fan with a permanent marker. (I often remind Julio of this story now—and how much fun he had AFTER school with his spray bottle of cleaner and an old rag getting rid of that marker. Oh, how his arms ached the next day!) My challenge with Julio was in keeping him busy, idle time gave his overactive mind and imagination ample opportunity to pursue mischief. We got along well and soon his energies were channeled in a direction that made learning in my classroom an active and many times, a hilarious experience.

It was in this year, when Julio and Bianca's father lost his job at the corporation where he had worked their entire lives. He had run a factory in the trade-zone, in Santiago and the corporation had paid for the children's tuition for SMCS from *pre-kinder* through high school. While Mr. Gomez was out of work, the family was not in a position to easily be able to pay for tuition on their own. So Julio's mother developed a small catering business and Mr. Gomez began looking for a job. He was able to procure a position in Santo Domingo, but it required that he commute each week and paying for an apartment there, which did not leave enough extra to allow the Gomez family to pay tuition. They needed to find other ways to support the family. Throughout the year, Julio struggled with being the 'man of the house' while his father was gone each week. He complained that there wasn't extra money to get to go out with friends and before long, the family had moved in with Mrs. Gomez's parents in order to continue paying the tuition for the children to remain at SMCS.

At the end of Julio's freshman year, Mr. Gomez determined that greater opportunities awaited the family in the United States. Since he was a U.S. citizen by birth, he decided that he would go ahead of the family and establish himself in a job and save to bring the family when he could provide for them. He was determined and excited; Mrs. Gomez and the kids were terrified, none of them had lived outside Santiago.

Mr. Gomez moved at the end of the school year, and by the time I had returned to the island for Julio's sophomore year and Bianca's junior year, Mr. Gomez had found a job on the mainland and was living in a house with another Dominican family. His hope was that in nine months he would be ready to invite his family to join him. It was a

stressful year for the family back in the Dominican Republic. Mrs. Gomez and the kids were still living with her parents, Luis missed his father and acted out toward his mother, Bianca faced each month of the school year and chronicled all the ‘lasts’ at SMCS with tears and quiet anger, and each month, the money was tight at home.

In the spring semester, the reality that a move to South Carolina was really going to happen began to creep upon the family. Mrs. Gomez flew to Columbia in search for a rental home in a good neighborhood. After her trip, she appeared in my classroom after school with a stack of papers, a sheen of uncertainty shielded by tears in her eyes. She sat down and asked that I would help her choose a high school for her children in South Carolina. She had toured some high schools there, but was overwhelmed at the size of the schools and the pages of curricular options. We worked as a team in the upcoming months, finding a school, writing letters of recommendation to put Julio and Bianca in college preparatory courses, and getting transcripts sent and credits determined so that each student felt more comfortable that a plan was in place for them in this new adventure in the States.

At the end of the school year, I was in the process of packing up my classroom and life in Santiago, as the Gomez family was packing a container of their furniture and belongings bound for their new lives in South Carolina. I hugged each family member goodbye and promised that we would be in touch.

We did stay in touch, across the miles between Nebraska and South Carolina, we chatted online, texted frequently, and from time to time talked on the phone. Both Bianca and Julio adjusted well to life in North Carolina, and much to the joy of their parents

excelled academically in their advanced courses. Julio joined the tennis and golf teams, made state in doubles tennis, and got an 'A' in his Advanced Placement English class, making his former English teacher proud! He managed to accomplish all of this without defacing any ceiling fans!

Julio's story offers yet another transnational perspective; I want to use his story as a backdrop to illustrate the contrast between continual movement back and forth (like Jonathan, the other case student who was in school in the US rather than the Dominican Republic at the end of my research), against one giant transition at one point in a student's educational journey. Julio's family history, does contain a transnational pattern, Julio's father was born in the U.S. and moved back and forth in his childhood, before attending university in Santiago, marrying and settling with his family. In his own words, Julio explains,

My family history, as far back as my grandparents consists of immigrants and locals. Both my maternal and paternal grandfathers were Spanish immigrants that fled their native country due to political conflicts [likely Spanish Civil War] that prolonged for several decades. Both of my grandfathers received their education in Spain. My grandmothers, now, they were both Dominicans. My paternal grandmother was born and raised in the Dominican Republic, where she also received her entire education. My maternal grandmother was born and raised in the United States and received her high school education in a boarding school in Canada. My dad was born in the United States where he lived a good part of his childhood before moving to the Dominican Republic. He did spend part of his

middle school education in Miami, but finished his high school career in the Dominican Republic. My mother was born in Santiago, where she spent her entire life. Both of my parents completed their college education in Santiago, my father majored in business and my mother majored in law.

Since Julio's father was a U.S. citizen, the Gomez family had open doors where other families would have found more limited opportunity. The students also had an easier transition because they had attended a bilingual school (SMCS) and began learning English since they were in kindergarten. Their educational track had continuously included an accredited American school education. When Julio describes his educational journey, he compares his education at SMCS with a suburban high school in one of the wealthiest areas of Columbia, South Carolina.

I attended SMCS from 1995 to 2008 and then from 2008 to 2010, I was at DFHS in South Carolina. My personal opinion is that the United States' educational system and the Dominican Republic's educational system has only one similarity and that is the teaching. The American educational system surpasses the expectations and the capabilities of the Dominican's system. By then, I mean, the American system overall has more well-prepared teachers. The American system also has more advanced knowledge and easier access to funds for learning materials. I like experiencing education in both places because it allowed me to view education and cultures from different aspects. I think that will help me further understand others and ways of teaching in the future when I'm in college. I guess, I would say that if I were to choose one place to go to school between the

two, I'd say that I'd prefer DFHS because I could feel the difference in the way we were taught and how teachers worked one on one more often than at SMCS. Also, I think that the teaching and technology made the information more accessible to students.

(I offer a caveat here to remind readers that Julio contrasts his educational experiences in a public U.S. high school and a private American school back on the island. What he refers to as the "Dominican system," is not representative of the Dominican public school system. Julio also makes broad statements about the American public school system verses the Dominican school system; it is important to recall that Julio's educational experience included only two schools throughout his entire academic career.)

As Julio reflected on his transition, he mentioned that while he would choose education in the U.S., that in either place, what made education work for him overall, was the teachers with whom he came into contact. "My favorite teachers were those who you could tell were passionate about the materials they taught and would do different activities in order to help you fully understand the information"

Julio was nervous when he left SMCS and said that, "the most difficult part about moving between schools was the social aspect, leaving your friends behind and moving on." Along with leaving behind life-long friends, Julio left behind classmates who, like him, were also bilingual and who shared Dominican culture. Unlike many Dominican immigrants, Julio's family did not settle in an area with a large Dominican population. In his high school in South Carolina, he was an obvious minority (although perhaps one marked more curiously than with hostility), surrounded by Caucasian students who

lacked a perspective to understand the world Julio had left behind. Julio felt fully competent to excel academically in his second language, and told me that he did not have a preference of language choice.

I have spoken both English and Spanish from a young age. I don't really have a preference as to which language I am to speak. It all depends on the situation or the place that I'm in. There is definitely a connection between language and my identity though. The language I speak represents who I am and where I come from. The language I speak helps me identify myself among others to define who I am.

And who is Julio?

I am a Dominican. To be Dominican is to love your '*platano and salami*.' This is a lot more profound than what it sounds like though. Dominicans are very devoted to their culture and this is what brings them together anywhere they are. To be a Dominican is to be a part of a big family or nation. There are several things that bring us together and this is a sign of who we are, whether it is food, parties, a hand of dominoes, or our famous holidays, Dominicans are always spending time together and socializing. To be a Dominican is to live and experience culture, always knowing that others are there to help you live it to the fullest and to have the greatest experience of your life.

Even after living in the U.S. for two years, even after choosing to remain in the U.S. for university (although Bianca chose to move to Spain and live with extended family for university), Julio considers himself "fully Dominican." Sometimes, this image

of himself clashed with the new reality of his suburban life in South Carolina. He went to prom with a huge group of Caucasian students. He got a job at Hollister at a nearby mall, and began to love his American Football nearly as much as his baseball. However, these external behaviors did not illustrate that with each paycheck, Julio put a large chunk aside for a plane ticket. After nearly two years away from “home,” Julio had enough money to book a flight back to Santiago in order to be there to see his classmates graduate from SMCS. He sat at the airport getting ready to leave for the island, and sent me a message: “Miss, I’m on my way home. You know the girls are gonna cry when they see me. I’m gonna party, goin’ to the beach, and seeing my family.” Later, according to Julio, the girls did in fact cry. I didn’t ask about the partying, but I know that he lived a summer full of Dominican life—full of *salami* and *platano*.

Julio’s transnational reality continued, even as he has enrolled as a student in a community college. He continued to work at Hollister and he continued to put money aside each month for the next plane trip “home.” Each time he returns to the island, he assumes his Dominican identity and sets aside some of his suburban U.S. traits. He talks baseball and replaces graphic t-shirts and tennis shoes for button down shirts and leather loafers.

Part II: Analysis

Like Jonathan and Rosa’s families, Julio’s transnational move was based upon financial need and a belief that greater opportunities existed in the United States to create wealth. Unlike many transnational families, since Julio’s father had spent many of his

formative years in the United States and was a U.S. citizen, the transition for Julio's family was unusual. Relatively quickly, Mr. Gomez was able to establish himself in the U.S. and send for his family. Also, unusual for many transnationals, all three of the Gomez's children had studied in an American school and had the academic proficiency and experience to excel in a public school in the United States. Unlike the students discussed in Olson's (1997) study of immigrant students, or Valenzuela's (1999) study of Mexican youth in a Texas high school, the Gomez children were able to "fit in" to their suburban high school because they already understood the unwritten norms and rules, and were fluent in both conversational and academic English.

All three of the kids were anxious for the transition but Mrs. Gomez was most anxious was because, although her English was proficient, she was not fluent. She also worried that her children might sacrifice quality of education in the move. She also worried that she would not know the "rules" for life in the U.S. and that her children would more ably pick them up than she would. This fear of a shift in the generational hierarchy is not uncommon for transnational parents who had authority and knowledge to take care of children in the home country. "In the United States, by contrast, it is often immigrant children who have emerged as intermediaries, owing to their greater English-language proficiency and familiarity with U.S. bureaucracies" (Pessar, 1995, p. 62). Because the Gomez family functioned well together as a unit, Mrs. Gomez found that her children helped her navigate situations with the utilities, school, and grocery shopping with support and respect, rather than manipulation.

Julio enjoyed the opportunities his new school afforded that SMCS did not. He joined the golf and tennis teams and had a wide variety of advanced courses from which to choose. In his narrative, he attempted to explain the differences he saw between schooling in the U.S. and in the Dominican Republic, which was the way he framed it even though the comparison and contrast was based on his two isolated school experiences. He never attended public school in the Dominican Republic and instead of comparing the education systems between two countries; instead, he compares a private American school education in the Dominican Republic with a suburban public school education in the United States.

Julio's description of his experiences in a public school in the United States does not reflect the same cultural subtractive quality that Angela Valenzuela describes in her study and one must wonder whether that is the result of Julio's previous American school experiences or more caring from his U.S. teachers than what Valenzuela observed. (Valenzuela, 1999). (This could be the result of the suburban education and Julio's higher socio-economic status.) Unlike Jonathan and Rosa, Julio believed that his education at DFHS was different than at SMCS because teachers were more prepared and spent more individual time with students. Julio placed strong emphasis and value in the time teachers spent and their qualifications as practitioners. This would align with Valenzuela's concept of the importance of "authentic care" to encourage student engagement with school. At SMCS, Julio had been labeled as an active, and ADHD. I wonder if his new clean slate at DFHS provided him with the opportunity to separate from such labels.

Unlike many Dominicans who return to the island as transnationals, Julio considers himself a transplanted national who is temporarily living in the United States. As a “national,” he means that he is a transplanted Dominican, who could also be described as transnational. He considers himself fully Dominican, one who, he says, “has had the opportunity to experience a different culture, who has acquired new influences from the new culture, and who is more knowledgeable about the world outside the Dominican Republic.” In the US, he has developed an identity that embraces both worlds. Torres-Saillant & Hernández describe this new identity and explain that, “Dominicans in the United States retain their simultaneous access to two geographies, nations, languages, and politics parallel models in reference to which to articulate their concepts of self and society. Their cultural forms have become hybrid, shaped by what is retained from the homeland and what is acquired in the host country” (1998, p. 147).

Julio makes frequent return visits back to the Dominican Republic. I asked Julio if he would put himself in the ‘dominicanyork’ classification and he quickly said, “no.” Julio describes ‘dominicanyorks’ as “those who have introduced American culture into their lives, but they aren’t fully educated. Many of them learn English from the ghetto or on the streets.” In his own mind he doesn’t fit in that class, because he is a fully educated Dominican who happens to have welcomed aspects of American culture into his life in order to bring him greater educational attainment and worldly perspectives. Like Jonathan and Rosa, who also have lived transnational lives, Julio rejects the label *dominicanyork* because of its negative stereotype or social rejection.

Part III: Teacher Reflection

Julio's anxiety about moving to the United States was the mirror opposite of Rosa's anxiety about adjusting to life in the Dominican Republic. Both students moved during their high school careers, but Julio's transition (which was also a family reunification) seemed smoother and with less personal turmoil. I have asked myself how strong the stigma of being a return transmigrant to the island played in Rosa's transition. I also wonder how much gender played a role in the ease of Julio's transition as compared to Rosa's. As Pessar explains, "a double standard often operates with sons being given more liberty than daughters to socialize without direct parent supervision" (Pessar, 1995, p. 66). I wonder if Julio's freedom to go out with friends in the U.S., to get a job, and to socialize made any difference in his transition and whether the lack of such freedom or the stigma of being seen as a *dominicanyork* (or returnee) for Rosa was what made her adjustment so difficult.

I also wonder at the influence Julio's education at a US-accredited school prior to migration had upon his adjustment to life in the United States. At SMCS, Julio's teachers were primarily Americans from the East Coast and Midwest and he learned through a curriculum that was accredited by a U.S. agency. For him, he gained opportunities in transition, with more sports teams to join and a wider array of courses from which to select. Unlike transnationals returning to the island, his extracurricular options at school were greater.

Julio, like Arelis, Rosa, and Jonathan was successful academically as a transnational student. He continued to adapt and selected pieces of his Dominican culture

as he acquired more aspects of American culture. His definition of being “Dominican” is unique compared to the others because his shows emphasis on “being Dominican” regardless of place which helped to link him to home on the Island, He stated that “Dominicans are devoted to their culture and this is what brings them together anywhere they are.” According to Julio, whether one currently resides on the island or not, has no bearing on what it means to be Dominican; it is about devotion to one’s Dominican culture. Julio would certainly consider himself fully Dominican even while living in South Carolina.

Conclusion:

Throughout this study, I was able to deepen my relationships with former students and their families and learn even more about their transnational histories and current realities. There were times that I had personal philosophies concerning education confirmed based on student-responses, but there were also moments when I was intrigued and even surprised as students shared their personal perceptions about transnational movement, filtered through their own personal experiences.

Students were quite candid about the perceived differences between students whose families were perceived to have been permanently on the island and those whose families lived transnational realities. Transnational dynamics, for both sending and receiving countries continue to broaden as individuals have access to greater mobility and seek opportunities for greater socio-economic status across national borders. The Dominican Republic, while possessing a rather short history of such movement, is one of

the most mobile of transnational populations because of easy access to and from the island (Levitt, 2001, p. 22).

One student from an “old” and prominent Dominican family explained that, There is a difference between a Dominican who has lived their entire life in the island and one that has moved or traveled outside of the country. I think people gain insight or new perspectives of life and they bring these ideas back to our country and help the economy. In my school, there were a lot of *dominicanyorks*. It may be a generalization or stereotype, but in my opinion, from what I have seen, these individuals are ones who have more of an American mindset. They usually dress with baggy jeans, big t-shirts, and tennis shoes, and like hip hop. But many I have met say that they like living in the D.R. more than the U.S. because the community is closer, and people are more friendly.

Alternately, another one of my students who spent most of his elementary school years in Massachusetts told me about his understanding of differences between transnationals and permanent residents of the Island. His description is unusual, because instead of referring to the US as “the mainland,” he specifically calls the Dominican island the “mainland.” I wonder what implications this has in his understanding what space is principal in his mind.

There is a slight difference between the Dominican who has lived on the mainland [island] and one which has traveled back and forth [to and from the United States]. I primarily see that the Dominican that travels back and forth has something in the United States that pulls him or her, but if they could choose their

circumstances they would live on the mainland. The Dominican that has traveled back and forth usually has a more American consumerist style. *Dominicanyorks* are those who bring the Dominican culture to major cities, such as New York and Boston. They are also those who may dress with an American style when they visit the island and are distinguishable among other Dominicans that do not leave the country.

From the range of participants and student responses as varied as these, four participants were selected to have their stories featured. These students were selected because of the variation in their (non)migration histories. Arelis is one example of the Dominican student and family who has remained on the island, Jonathan serves as an example the student and family who has made multiple transitions back and forth between the Dominican Republic and the United States, Rosa illuminates a third model: the student and family that returns to the island after a length of time living in the United States and Julio represents the student and family who moves to the United States in order to access greater economic opportunities and/or reduce economic vulnerabilities.

The focus of this study has been to examine how transnational movement, across these four purposefully varying stories, affected student academic achievement and their identity. As outlined in the review of literature, for many transnational students, school can be a subtractive and challenging place, and identities are fluid based on situation. (Bailey, 2000; Becker, 1990; Dicker, 2006; Pita and Utakis, 2002; Sanchez, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999). The four students featured in my study (from privileged backgrounds), however, each experienced overall success as students in the classroom

and are currently college students both on the island and in the United States. Each also has identities that have been uniquely forged from his or her individual experiences. Common to all four stories, however is an acknowledgement that school-success is rooted in teacher-relationship and caring as discussed by Valenzuela in her study (1999) of Mexican Americans in the United States. Also common was that a discussion of identity and nation(s) resonated with each, even as they responded in varying fashions.

Students' educational careers have certainly been shaped according to each student's unique perspective. No matter the transnational history of the individual, messages about what educational experiences and teachers engaged student success are often parallel. Teachers who "had a positive attitude in class," "were always there for students in and out of class," who could "control a teacher to student relationship while creating a friendship with them too," and who challenged students to push themselves, were celebrated. Students identified as teachers who set themselves apart, and made the students' educational journey a successful experience. One transnational student lamented that,

The most difficult part of moving back and forth to the United States, was that I missed what made up my school in the Dominican Republic. The people I missed because those people also contributed to my education, meaning we all learned from each other. In the U.S. people are less social and therefore it feels as if even though there are more kids in the classroom, it is just you and the teacher.

All four of the case study participants communicated similar sentiments, that teacher's authentic care for them, and rigorous expectations rooted in understanding of

students' interests and prior knowledge, enabled student success. For all four of these students, this value of teacher relationship and being mentored by teachers continues; many of these relationships continue long after students have moved on to different classrooms or have graduated. (Indeed, if they did not, this would be a much less robust study.)

As pointed out by Valenzuela (1999) and Reyes (2000), many schools and teachers are currently not responsive to the unique needs of students from diverse and transnational backgrounds. As a result, students in many studies, as those described in the review of literature, have not experienced the same success as those students who participated in my study. The central difference, as described by Valenzuela, Reyes, and each of the four case-study participants is a culture of care and expectation. Reyes explains that teachers have a unique responsibility to become “ambassadors” for their transmigrant students and that in Puerto Rico, the “Transition into the system would have been helped greatly if the teachers had some understanding of the students’ experiences in U.S. schools” (2000, pp. 61-62).

Valenzuela expands upon this idea when she asserts that teachers in the classroom and districts at a policy level need to shift from thinking solely about teaching methodology and effectiveness and work toward establishing a culture of caring within classrooms, because “individuals need to be recognized and addressed as whole beings” (1999, p. 74). Valenzuela later explains that when “examining misunderstandings of caring, a fundamental source of students’ alienation and resistance becomes apparent” (1999, pp. 108-109). When students experience these “misunderstandings of caring,”

Valenzuela points out, it is because “Schools like Seguin not only fail to validate their students’ culture, they also subtract resources from them, first by impeding the development of authentic caring; secondly, by obliging youth to participate in a non-neutral, power-draining type of aesthetic caring” (1999, p. 109).

Perhaps what encouraged Jonathan, Rosa, and Julio’s success through their transition was a culture, at least in certain classrooms and with certain teachers, where they were recognized for their individual experiences and as “whole beings” including the complicated identities they brought to bear. For Jonathan, those teachers were the ones who “were understanding and actually took the time to talk to me and laugh at my good humor.” For Rosa, such teachers were those who “really cared about your success” and where “you couldn’t get lost no matter what.” For Julio, caring teachers were those who “you could tell were passionate about the materials they taught and would do different activities to help you fully understand the information.” This value upon teacher care was also central to Arelis’s success, because of class-size, “we also had better connections to our teachers.”

Although the definition of “care” is worded differently according to each of these case students, the consistent element is that teachers know their students as individuals and take the time to make sure that students achieve according to their individual need. Central to all of this is the relationship that teachers establish with their students. Teachers should “embark on a search for connection where trusting relationships constitute the cornerstone for all learning” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 263).

With the relationship established as the “cornerstone,” then upon that foundation, curriculum can be established. Within the curriculum structure, in order, “To be meaningful and effective, instructional adaptations need to be tailored to the children in the classroom and the school, not to preconceived ideas about what membership in a particular social group means for all members in that group” (Reese, 2002, p. 54). In order to specifically tailor such instruction, the relationship—the understanding of each student and his or her funds of knowledge, the resources available through each family, must be leveraged. “Teachers can discover the cultures of their students through close observation of their students in a wide variety of classroom experiences and close listening to parents and children in the course of conversations...” (Reese, 2002, p. 54). With this knowledge of each student and his or her background, teachers have the challenge “to figure out not just a curriculum that builds on what students already know, but one that is also conscious of the circumstances transnational students negotiate and likely will need to negotiate in the future” (Hamann, Zuñiga, Sánchez & García, 2006, p. 268).

At the classroom level, and at a building and policy level, curriculum and instruction that is responsive to student prior knowledge should also be rigorous and enable students to pursue courses of education that will meet their transnational future needs. Kristin Percy Calaff, in her 2008 study of a high school in a northeastern U.S. city with a diverse enrollment, describes the relationships and understanding, as well as the rigor necessary to challenge transnational students. The culture of the high school “embraced its students’ past by valuing their cultural and linguistic backgrounds...The

school also reached out to parents through the use of interpreters, notices sent in multiple languages, and a Spanish parent organization” (Calaff, 2008, pp. 101,103). With the focused goal of helping all students succeed, regardless of primary language, or cultural background, “The school also used high expectations coupled with a complex safety net to help all students meet the requirements for a high school diploma...to this extent the school had created many alternative course sequences, specialized courses, and courses to provide additional support for students needing help with their English, or certain academic skills” (Calaff, 2008, pp. 100-101).

Although SMCS, did not have such extensive course selection and flexibility, the four case-study participants discussed not only the strong relationships they established with teachers, but also the unique projects and rigor specific teachers established in their courses. Arelis explained that her “favorite teachers were the ones that always challenged me, gave me a hard time, made me think outside the box, and got me outside my comfort zone.” Jonathan describes the special projects that inspired his success, “My favorite projects were hands-on projects, and definitely group projects, because I like to lead my group with finding ideas and organizing information.” Rosa explained that “the harder the teacher was, the more motivated I was to get an A. I feel like the more teachers communicate with their students and push them just enough, it really makes all the difference.” Julio describes teachers who “worked one on one,” and who were “well-prepared teachers” in their subjects.

Further study on transnationalism and the effect it has on students who move between two worlds is necessary, especially as we develop second and even third-

generation transnationals. Movement between the Dominican Republic and the United States, from all indications, will continue to be strong as accessibility to flights, communication, and media is available. Long-established transnational networks are currently growing beyond traditional receiving cities like New York, Boston, and Miami. Today, it is not unusual to find Dominicans as far inland as Nebraska, where I currently have met a small Dominican community network that continues to recruit others to the center of the United States.

With the spread of transnational networks, classroom teachers, administrators, and policy-makers need to understand the unique needs of transnational students who may enter their buildings and classrooms. At the core of that, is an understanding of the wealth of the funds of knowledge students carry with them based on their experiences, and an appreciation for the value of such knowledge (Velez-Ibanez, & Greenberg, 1992). Practitioners should work to establish strong relationships with students, a curriculum that builds upon student prior-knowledge and experiences, and rigor that will prepare students for future academic post-secondary study and a successful future in a cultural diverse world.

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