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## Identifying the Anthropological in a Mixed-Methods Study of Transnational Students in Mexican Schools

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Identifying surveying as more commonly sociological and semi-structured interviewing as more commonly anthropological, which describes disciplinary histories more than any fixed formulas, we juxtapose transnational students' survey answers collected in Mexican schools with their answers to interviews several months later. From this, we consider what can be learned about research methodology and transnational student cosmology when different methods yield discrepant answers. Without claiming superiority for either mechanism, we find their combination illuminating, and it substantiates the claim that anthropological inquiry can add crucial value to mixed-methods, interdisciplinary inquiry.

### Asserting a Broader and Collaborative Role for Anthropology

There are two academic origins for this paper; the first was a 2010 European conference on the anthropology of childhood, and the second was a 2015 conference in Thailand that asked for reexamination of the boundaries between anthropology and sociology. Those two points of origin reconcile in the text that follows in that we first explain how anthropological inquiry in a larger mixed-methods study highlighted how some less anthropological research techniques masked how children were understanding their transnational mobility, with more anthropological techniques helping recover their voices, and second assert more abstractly that anthropology can productively intertwine with sociology to create an interdisciplinary composite shedding light on education and migration that we

think is richer and more broadly relevant than would have been a study that came from a more narrow single disciplinary stance.

We do not propose that our work dissolves the differences between the two often-rival social science disciplines, but our emphasis is on complementarities rather than boundaries. Nor do we claim that cultural anthropology cannot use surveys (it sometime has and does) or that sociology cannot focus on the qualitative and the way those being studied make sense of social phenomena (indeed, this is a central premise of ethnomethodology, which emerges from sociological origins; Coulin 1995; Giddens 1976). But identifying what is possible and occasional is not the same as considering what is typical and even orthodox, and the fact remains here that it was a sociologist who brought a quantitative, more demography-oriented perspective and an anthropologist who brought his discipline's long-term concern with the emic. Our collaboration, also enhanced by the long-term collaboration of a teacher educator, has been richer and deeper than any one of us could have produced on our own, and we intend this as a reminder of the prospective power of seeing disciplines as sources of questions and techniques that can be productively reconciled with other disciplines that have overlapping but not synonymous concerns. More specifically, given that the audience of *Current Anthropology* is, logically, centrally concerned with anthropology, we want this piece to illuminate and remind of the prospective contributions of anthropology to projects that do not have to be seen as anthropological only or mainly.

### Changes? Inconsistencies? Or a Child's Worldview?

José Luis was a 12-year-old boy finishing his first year of *secundaria* (the equivalent of seventh grade in the United States) when we interviewed him in June 2010 in a city of 40,000 in the state of Puebla, Mexico, where he lived. Our interview of José Luis occurred almost exactly 6 months after others in our research team had visited his school and administered written surveys to him and all of his classmates, as well as to some students in other classrooms in his school. In that survey, José Luis had indicated that, although born in Mexico, he had lived and gone to school in California from kindergarten through grade 4. In short, like other students we have written about (Hamann and Zúñiga 2011a, 2011b; Hamann, Zúñiga, and Sánchez García 2006, 2010; Zúñiga and Hamann 2015; Zúñiga, Hamann, and Sánchez García 2008), he was a transnational student, just the kind of student we were looking for as we tried to better understand how children who negotiate schools in more than one country fare. To clarify, although José Luis was quite aware of the difference in his biography from peers who had only ever lived in Mexico, "transnational" is our label, not one he used self-referentially.

In his survey José Luis indicated that he aspired to study at the university level, but when we interviewed him he said

he really was more interested in a vocational- or technical-training trajectory and that university education was more his mother's aspiration for him. In his survey he had checked off the box that said that his parents thought his education was important, but when we asked him about that point in the interview he redirected the conversation to emphasize his sense that his teachers in California had been the ones with particularly high expectations for him.

On the survey he indicated that he thought he "might" (checking the box "*tal vez*") return to study in the United States in the future. In the interview, however, his response on this topic revealed that he understood the question a different way than we had intended; he pointed out that he did not particularly care whether he continued his education in the United States or in Mexico per se, but that he wanted to stay in one location or the other, as the prospect of needing to build new friendships felt daunting. (Ours had been a question about probability and his interview response referenced desirability.)

He wrote in his survey, when asked to describe an example of when US teachers had been good to him, that "my teachers there didn't dislike me although I was different" ("*Por mi diferencia no me despreciaban*"). However, in his interview, he pointed out that he had liked his teachers in California because they had paid a lot of attention to him. We would summarize that they had "authentically cared" for him (Valenzuela 1999:61). (Of course, connecting his words to the US research literature on Latino education is our doing, not his.) In a similar vein, on the survey he had mentioned that he thought that his parents felt his education was very important, but in the interview he expanded on this question not by talking further about his parents but instead by acknowledging his California teachers' recognition that his education was important to them.

We find the differences in José Luis's written answers on the surveys and oral answers to the interview to be fascinating but also a little unnerving. They are fascinating in how they illustrate the complex and situated thinking that is behind children's various, seemingly straightforward, forced-choice survey responses, but they are unnerving in that they reveal that the survey answers we have carefully collected and aggregated may mask much richer and more nuanced explanations, at least sometimes and for some items. The point here is to consider the occasional mismatches between children's survey answers and their interview responses and to ponder the importance of those mismatches. We think that they highlight the value of anthropological inquiry as a component of a project that is consciously mixed in methods and led by a sociologist.

Even a cursory glance at José Luis's responses suggests that reasons for mismatches likely vary. In the first example, in his survey José Luis offered the answer that he thought he should give (what his mother wanted), but in the interview he seemed to feel that he could explain his own aspirations. At his age (12), it may not be easy to separate "my own" aspirations from

"my mother's aspirations for me." It also seems likely that an interview offered him more of a chance to appraise us, the researchers, and decide that a candid rather than an expected answer would be "welcome" or "safe." However, that does not mean that his survey answer was "wrong"—it likely was a sincere read of his social environment and what constituted an appropriate answer—but it is important that we not overinterpret it.

On a second topic, his responses illustrated how our point of interest (probability of return) varied from his (desirability of return) in our inquiry about his possible future transnational mobility. Then two of his other answers also suggested a point of emphasis different from the one we had expected when he redirected our attention to his California teachers. To our interview question about his parents' sense of the importance of his schooling, he agreed that his parents felt his education was important, but he then emphasized the value of his California teachers' aspirations for him (a domain where our survey question had not probed). To our direct question about his California teachers, his oral response (in our interview)—when he described their caring—made more sense than did our literal translation of his survey response (from 6 months earlier). From the interview, we learned that parents' expectations are intermingled with teachers' expectations into some more macro caregivers' expectations, at least for José Luis. So the survey had artificially separated the ways the two sources contributed to his definition of his academic self. Further complicating the analysis, it seems plausible that a further explanation for changes in his thinking reflected that the interview happened months after the survey and that his thinking could have changed.

Analyzing José Luis's responses reminds us of how research questions can lead us away from understanding children's cosmologies even as they give us a numeric count of one issue or another that we (the researchers) think is important. Orellana (2009) emphasizes that the core task of ethnography is to relate the world as those whom you are studying see it. While our work would not be accurately summarized as an ethnography, it is incumbent on us to acknowledge Orellana's perspective (and thus recognize that our student informants had different perspectives than we did, even if our capturing of their perspectives was quite modest and incomplete) in our larger consideration of the implications of the presence of transnationally mobile students in Mexican schools.

In tracing the mismatches in information gathered from José Luis related to when and how we collected information from him, our intent is to set up a core claim that anthropological perspectives can be a crucial and rich component of a multidisciplinary study where the framing logic is not one discipline versus another (e.g., anthropology vs. sociology, geography, or demography) but rather what best makes the case that what we have been studying merits broader attention. If the question "Why does this matter?" always lingers behind research, we claim that both that it does and that how it does is both anthropological and sociological.

## Our Study: Capturing Transnational Students' Experiences

In November 2009, our binational interdisciplinary research team began a third phase of a multiyear, multistate, mixed-methods study of children in Mexican schools who previously had attended school in the United States (Zúñiga, Hamann, and Sánchez García 2008). That study had already revealed, first, that there is a large and growing population in Mexican schools with prior experience in the United States—we recently estimated (Zúñiga 2012) that there were 420,000 such students in public and private *primarias* and *secundarias* (i.e., the 9 years of elementary and middle school that until 2012 constituted all of the years of obligatory schooling in Mexico). Similarly and second, it has shown that there are many students in Mexican *primarias* and *secundarias* who were born in the United States and thereby have US citizenship, per the US Constitution's promise that anyone born on American soil is an American citizen. We estimated that there were 330,000 such US-born students (children aged 6–15) enrolled in Mexican schools in 2010 (Zúñiga 2012). (This tally should be seen as a minimum estimate rather than a full one for the US citizen population in Mexican schools, as there are additional ways and circumstances through which a child might have US citizenship.) These points, in turn, offer reminders that Mexico is not just a sending nation in reference to international mobility and that the United States is not just a receiving one (a point recently reiterated by demographers Passel, Cohn, and Gonzalez-Barrera 2012). Third, our mixed-methods inquiry revealed that the highest concentrations of students with transnational experience were in the *municipios* (counties) that Mexico's census bureau has identified as having the highest participation in international migration.

Yet none of these findings say much about how students negotiate this transition from one country's system to another's. For that, we have turned to open-ended prompts and interviews (as we further delineate below). The numbers we have generated, consistent with sociology and demography, demonstrate the salience of our inquiry from a policy standpoint—this matters for hundred of thousands of children and thousands of schools—but, on their own, the surveys say much less that we would categorize as anthropological—that is, the world as experienced by those we are trying to depict. Yet it is the latter that sets up consideration of constructivist pedagogical and curricular reform—that is, redesign that is responsive to such children's experiences and learned ways of seeing the world. To be sure, ethnomethodology is a sociology-originating, mainly qualitative, research orientation that does embrace consideration of the world as experienced (Coulin 1995), but that impulse is much more dominant in cultural anthropology, and, from a biographical standpoint, ethnomethodology was not a starting point for any of us, but cultural anthropology was.

In each phase of the study, for grades 4–9, we used written surveys (in Spanish) as a means to first identify students with

binational school experience and then obtain more detailed information from those who acknowledged such experience. (We did conduct brief group oral interviews with younger grade levels, but our assumption was that responding to the survey required at least a fourth-grade reading level, an assumption that seemed sensible to the teachers and others we collaborated with and that was not consistently problematic, the mismatches noted here notwithstanding.)

This use of written surveys for grades 4 and above was our strategy in Puebla in the autumn of 2009. In turn, in the spring of 2010, members of the research team returned to many of the schools in that state to interview students who had identified their transnational experiences on the earlier survey. These interviews in English, Spanish, or both (per the students' preference and lead) greatly deepened the amount of information about how students had negotiated both countries' schools and usually confirmed answers from the earlier survey, but not always.

It was clear from the interviews (which usually also entailed us showing that we had a copy of the student's previously completed written questionnaire) that, in some instances, the answers offered in the written survey were not capturing what a given student had experienced or felt. For example, some students on the survey did not identify that they had been in bilingual education classes in the United States, but in interviews identified that some of their US instruction had been in Spanish and other portions in English. They were unfamiliar with what "*educación bilingüe*" on our survey had intended to reference, so they did not check it off. While we remember the pitched battles about bilingual education in the United States in the 1990s and 2000s that included California, Arizona, and Massachusetts banning it through ballot initiatives and Colorado rejecting such an initiative (McField 2014), our motive here for asking about possible prior experience with bilingual education had been more prosaic; it made sense that students with academic cultivation of their Spanish proficiency in the United States would transition more easily to Mexican schools, but to examine this premise required knowing which transnational students had had such experiences.

But examining transnational students' school experience is not our main point here (although it is the point of the larger study). Rather, we want to highlight some of the items that children were less likely to consistently respond to (i.e., to identify what survey items led us to understandings different from the interview responses). Ultimately, this sets up consideration of how research methods that traditionally are common in cultural anthropology inquiry can contribute to a larger interdisciplinary inquiry.

Students living the complicated educational biography of attending schools in two different countries are really the only source for information about how that discontinuity has been negotiated. Yet questions that adult researchers want to know—for example, the kind of overt language education transnational children experienced in the United States—may

not be sensible questions from the standpoint of the children we hope to learn from. We conclude that more ethnographic approaches (e.g., in-person interviews and observations in the schools) can serve not only as correctives to information gathered through other means but also as persistent reminders of the mismatch between what adult researchers seek to know and the cosmologies of children, with the latter ultimately more important for explaining how school systems are experienced and negotiated than the former.

In a brilliant article on schoolchildren in rural France, Reed-Danahy (2000) reminds us how intrinsically limited our adult sources are if we want to know the worlds that children are negotiating. She points out that parents do not “see” what happens at school, nor do teachers “see” what happens at home (although no doubt both get hints of the other environment and draw conjectures about them; Valdés 1996). Only the children who negotiate both environments know both directly, so Reed-Danahy says that only they have the full perspective on what is encountered and the symbol systems deployed to negotiate those encounters. As researchers, then, we need to turn to the children for some research questions, whatever new challenges this then creates. We must communicate with children, not just about them.

In our case, since first obtaining funding from Mexico’s Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT) in 2003, we have been attempting to describe the experiences of students we have encountered in Mexico who have previously been in schools in the United States (e.g., Hamann, Zúñiga, and Sánchez García 2006; Sánchez García, Hamann, and Zúñiga 2012; Zúñiga and Hamann 2009; Zúñiga, Hamann, and Sánchez García 2008). Using even Reed-Danahy’s (2000) simple categories of school and home, the students in our studies are the only ones privy to all four environments (or more) that have shaped their experiences as transnational students: a home environment in the United States, a school environment in the United States, a home environment in Mexico, and a school environment in Mexico. Of course, there are adults present in each of these environments, but who those adults are varies; almost always none of them know more than two of their child’s environments (e.g., perhaps parents know both the US and Mexican domestic contexts; Guerra 1998), and almost none, except the children, know more than one of the school contexts. Thus, if we want to know what the children have negotiated, whether it advantages them or disadvantages them as students, whether they are incipient bilingual, bicultural beings or stuck between worlds with little cultural capital in either, we need to turn to them. Yet that decision creates its own set of paradoxes, challenges, and limitations.

This research project began as part of an earlier effort that examined a demographically fast-changing school district in Georgia (in the United States) and a binational mobilization meant to respond to this district’s changing enrollment and changing needs (see Hamann 2003). It is worth mentioning this earlier study because it explains why we first began to

collaborate across disciplinary boundaries as well as where our interest in transnationally experienced students in Mexico first originated. That district’s Hispanic (or Latino) enrollment surged from 4% to a majority in just a decade, and the binational project that responded to this change included a team of Mexican sociologists (including coauthor Víctor Zúñiga), who engaged in survey work with the newcomer population. The sociologists found that almost a quarter of Mexican newcomer parents thought that neither they nor their children would still be in that Georgia community 3 years hence. While most newcomer parents indicated an intention to stay (substantiating the sociologists’ claim that the newcomers saw themselves as a permanent new local population), we began to wonder what would happen to the mobile students (Hamann 2001; Hamann and Zúñiga 2011a): What would they encounter? What would they need from school?

In 2004, with funding from CONACYT, we were able to start collecting empirical data that examined those questions and others, as we began a study in 173 *primarias* (grades 1–6) and *secundarias* (grades 7–9) in the state of Nuevo León, Mexico. Surveying 14,444 students, we found 246 students there with previous US school experience. Of these, 203 were judged old enough to respond to a lengthy written questionnaire, with enrollment in grade 4 or higher as our delineation for which students would get the written survey.

With small adjustments to our survey and still with CONACYT support, in 2005 we repeated this work in another Mexican state, Zacatecas. There we visited 214 schools and found 266 students with previous experience in US schools, including 223 who were advanced enough in their studies (i.e., fourth grade or higher) that they responded to an extensive questionnaire. In both Zacatecas and Nuevo León, we conducted a few interviews of students and teachers; in both cases this was concurrent with the site visits where we shared the surveys and did not involve cross-referencing written responses and oral ones, although it did give us a fuller picture of what students were negotiating than the surveys alone would have. Still, neither the Nuevo León nor the Zacatecas phases of the project allowed as much juxtaposition of methods and recorded responses as did the Puebla phase described here.

With new funding from Mexico’s Secretaría de Educación Pública, in November 2009, our binational research team began a third phase of a multiyear, multistate, mixed-methods study. This time we visited 214 schools in the state of Puebla, which has a much newer and shorter history of migration to the United States (Marroni 2003). There we found 110 students with previous US school experience, 85 of whom were in fourth grade or higher and who thus were given written surveys. During return visits in the spring of 2010 to a purposeful selection of the Puebla schools from the original sample, we were able to interview 31 transnational students, 25 of whom had previously answered surveys. While for our larger project, Puebla is just one of the Mexican states studied, for this paper all the data used to directly ponder the interface

between disciplines and data collection strategies come from some of these 25. (Since the fieldwork in Puebla, we have also begun and/or completed work in the Mexican states of Jalisco and Morelos.) Although this work uses just the Puebla cases, there is no reason to think that what is described here would be much different from a similar cross-referencing of data collected in the other states.

Per a logic of triangulation (Patton 1990) and with an awareness that any data collection strategy brings its intrinsic limitations as well as strengths, all of the phases of the study have been multimethod, combining written surveys with site visits, interviews, and other observational data. But the instrumentation for each phase has become slightly more sophisticated and refined as we have reviewed and revised our data collection strategy after each phase.

This increased sophistication has not changed the reality focused on here—that children seem to offer different responses (at least sometimes) based on the mode of inquiry. However, the larger study's growing sophistication has likely exacerbated an intrinsic challenge to studies like these: as researchers can be more nuanced and particular in what they ask, they risk getting farther from both the language and the social categories children use to negotiate the world. This seems particularly plausible when at least some of the phenomena of interest are of interest because they are relevant to topics like teacher preparation, in-service professional development, and the formal curricula that guide these—topics highly relevant to children but well removed from the cosmologies they use for their quotidian negotiation of school and the larger world.

### Adults' Questions/Children's Answers

Students living the complicated educational biography of attending schools in two different countries are really the best source for information about how that discontinuity has been negotiated, because they are the only ones who have been participants in most of its facets. Yet some questions that adult researchers want to pose may not be sensible questions from the standpoint of the children. Ultimately, we conclude that more anthropological approaches (e.g., in-person interviews) can serve not only as correctives to information gathered through other means but also as persistent reminders of the mismatch between what adult researchers seek to know and the cosmologies of children, with the latter ultimately more important for explaining how school systems are experienced and negotiated than the former.

Nonetheless, if it still makes sense to gather information from children (and we strongly believe that it does), the next issue then is to consider how children's responses might vary from those being sought by adults. Examining the discrepancies captured by using different research instrumentation, we can identify a number of ways children's answers may depart from what adult researchers seek or expect. (Although it is not further pursued here, we recognize that what adult re-

searchers expect or want to know often reproduces assumptions about the role of and rationale for schooling.) In the following paragraphs we explore several explanations for a mismatch between adult researchers' expectations and children's responses: children's confusion regarding what is being asked (clarification); their willingness to share more orally or remember a detail that was not included in their original written response (elaborations); their correction of memories as additional prompts improve/change what they remember (revision); and, finally, their confidence in sharing a response in an interview that they were reluctant to share in a survey (trust). José Luis's sharing (noted above) that university was more his mother's aspiration while he was vocationally inclined may be an example of this last category. Various examples of the other categories follow.

### Confusion

One reason for discrepancies between written survey responses and what we were told during interviews may have been confusion about what was being asked during the survey. For example, Jesús, a 12-year-old who was in his first year of *secundaria* (seventh grade) did not indicate on his survey that he had lost a year of schooling when he returned to Mexico after he returned from California because he was not initially able to enroll. During his interview he told us this fact. Perhaps he had misunderstood the survey question to assume that it was asking about attending the same grade level twice (as opposed to functionally missing a year and similarly ending up a year behind). Further supporting this diagnosis of "confusion," he asked to be interviewed in English (which may have been his stronger language), while the survey had been in Spanish.

A second example, also related to language, came from Marisol, a 14-year-old who had attended third through sixth grade in Arizona in the mid-2000s (at a time when Arizona education policies and other policies were becoming sharply anti-immigrant; Cortez Román and Hamann 2014). When we met her she was in her second year of *secundaria* (eighth grade). In her interview, she offered a different answer for the language she identified as her first language. Like everyone else, she had responded to our Spanish language survey in December in Spanish, but, like just a handful of students, when we asked in which language she preferred to be interviewed she requested English, explaining that she felt more comfortable in that language. Surprised by this and perhaps hinting at a conflation on our part between first language and dominant language, we asked why she had answered on the survey that her first language was Spanish. She answered, "Well, I'm bilingual" and explained that she had two "first" languages. In our academic minds, there was no room for two "firsts." In Marisol's linguistic experience, there clearly was. As the interview continued, we then asked her about her sense of national affiliation. She had checked "*mexicana*" on the survey, but during the interview she told us "Mexican American." It would be hazardous for us to characterize stu-

dents' written responses as "wrong" or "false," but these had clearly led us to understandings different from what the students intended. Research dependent on survey responses alone would have overlooked this nuance.

Moreover, written surveys create a second limitation: they require unilateral decisions regarding what language or languages to use without knowing the particular language background(s) of students. Given their use in Mexican schools with support of Mexican teachers, all our surveys were in Spanish. We could have also made available English translations, and that might have improved their comprehensibility to those students with much more academic experience in English, as just hinted, but even that gesture would have ignored the prospect that students living in and going to school in two cultures likely had more nuanced language profiles than just dominance of English or Spanish as, depending on the topic, for some students the preferred and/or better-understood language varied. For example, for some it was likely easier to describe family in Spanish but academic work in English; this reflected a lifetime of Spanish being the dominant language of home but more schooling having been conducted in English (in the United States).

Yet the concept of "translanguaging" (García and Wei 2013) points to another intriguing possibility. According to García and Wei, bi- and multilingual speakers can reference all their linguistic repertoire when they communicate, and their choice of English, Spanish, or blends of both may reflect not greater adeptness in one or another but rather much more nuanced calculations about ways of being clear, inclusive, exclusive, and so on. The survey did not ask for answers in a language other than Spanish, although occasionally students nonetheless wrote in English, but in the immediate interaction of an interview or face-to-face conversation, translanguaging may well have seemed easier and more welcome. No doubt some of our survey questions could have been confusing to children, but concurrently possible was that the confusion came from our overinterpretation of their answers.

#### *Elaborations*

Perhaps the second discrepancy in Marisol's answers named above (i.e., the one about national affiliation) was less a display of confusion (although that remains plausible) than what could be better understood as an elaboration. In claiming to be Mexican American, Marisol may not have been refuting her first answer ("*mexicana*") so much as expanding on it, particularly given that the interview had focused so much on her memories of schooling in Arizona. She may have thought of herself as both "*mexicana*" and "Mexican American," with each identity better referencing identity assertions related to geography, so Marisol was "*mexicana*" in Mexico but also "Mexican American" if she was depicting the ontology of her Arizona self. Indeed, a more complicated synthesis is possible: using those two terms (and perhaps others we did not happen to ask about), perhaps Marisol and other students were trying

to articulate a kind of hybrid third identity, not just an identity in Mexico and another one in the United States, but rather a third one that indexed not feeling completely described by the label in either country. Perhaps this third identity is akin to the "Borderlands/*La Frontera*" sensibility that Chicana poet Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) famously articulated, although we did not hear Marisol or any of the other students use this term, and Puebla is more than 1,000 km south of the physical border.

As a second example of elaboration, consider the case of Sandy, a 14-year-old girl who had attended kindergarten through sixth grade in a bilingual-education program in California. In her third year of *secundaria* (ninth grade) when we surveyed and interviewed her, she changed her survey answer that she taught English to those who wanted to learn it (as a response to what she did to maintain or improve her English) to also mention that she read English-language books and magazines at home and listened to English-language music. On the survey she told us that she maintained some contact through phone calls and letters with those she had known in the United States, but in the interview she added that she also used e-mail and "Messenger" with her mother and friends. On this second point, on her survey she had checked that her mother was in the United States, but through the interview we not only confirmed this geographic separation but also learned at least some of how she and her mother endeavored to overcome this distance. Her survey responses were not "wrong," but they became much richer when she had our attentive affects reinforcing the idea that we were eager to hear her elaborations.

As still another example of elaboration from a third transnational student, we learned from Abimael, an 11-year-old, a different version of why he had returned to Mexico. Abimael, who had attended kindergarten and first and second grade in Arizona, had written on his survey that he had returned to Mexico because his parents had not wanted to stay in the United States. In the interview he added that they had not wanted to stay because his mother was sick. With the limited initial information from Abimael's survey, it would be plausible to posit that his relocation was precipitated by a desire to move from (from the United States), but the elaboration raises the prospect that his relocation had more to do with a move to (to Mexico and a probable larger infrastructure of extended family that could offer support). The point is that his elaboration changed/refined a likely way his initial written response could be understood.

#### *A Second Form of Elaboration: Remembering*

We also found that sometimes through interviews students would remember information that they had not included on the survey. For example, Noemi, a fourth-grade student in *primaria*, could not remember on her survey where in the United States she had attended kindergarten (her only school year in the United States). Initially in her interview, she also

indicated that she did not remember where she had been, but when we started listing US states, she lit up when we said “Arizona.” She responded with a smile “Phoenix!”

In turn, Concepción, a 13-year-old in her first year of *secundaria* (seventh grade) had also attended only kindergarten in the United States. On her survey she had not indicated that she had repeated a year of school, but in the interview, when we started recounting where she had been in her previous years of schooling she remembered that when she first came to Mexico she had not been able to enroll immediately and had lost a year. Similarly, in her interview, Lupita, an 11-year-old who was in the fifth grade of *primaria*, remembered during her interview not only that she had lost a year not being able to enroll in Mexico but also that her one year in the United States (in California) had involved repeating first grade.

Given that a fifth-grade student who is 11 at the end of her fifth-grade year is not obviously much older than her grade-level peers, it is possible that Lupita’s change to her survey response also includes some confused memories about the chronology of her early education; it may be that there was a gap at some point where she was back in Mexico and was unable to immediately enroll, and it is possible that she attended first grade in California having already been in first grade in Mexico, but it does not seem that she was 2 years behind. Indeed, she may not have even been behind at all (although our use of “behind” is yet another reminder of how schooling creates norms related to age and development level.)

#### Revision

During interviews, not only did some transnational students remember details that they had left blank on the survey but on other issues the prodding of an interview led them to amend a previous written response. So, for example, Sayra (like Marisol earlier) asked that her interview be in English. Sayra was a 13-year-old who was in the second year of *secundaria* (eighth grade) after having spent the first 8 years of her education (kindergarten through seventh grade) at three different schools in California. She had identified on her survey that Spanish was her first language. However, in the interview she corrected this and said that English was her first language. Later in the interview (and unwittingly articulating the core premise of García and Wei’s *Translanguaging* [2013]), she amended her response again, pushing back against the premise of a “first” language, saying, “I am bilingual.”

Another student, Ana Karen, a 15-year-old girl in her final year of *secundaria* (ninth grade) had enrolled in grades 1–6 in North Carolina. She too had identified Spanish as her first language in the (Spanish-language) questionnaire, but in the interview she identified her proficiency in English, and she too pushed back against the idea of having just one first language. Our survey anticipated clean, definitive answers, but the students’ interview responses made it clear that answers were not definitive per our a priori conceptualizations. To them

the construct of a first language (as opposed to first languages) seemed problematic.

#### Identifying the Anthropological in Mixed-Methods Research

Surveys are not “anti-anthropological,” and there are long traditions of using surveys within that discipline. However, if a goal of cultural anthropology is to identify the emic (Harris 1976; Wolcott 1988)—the way the world is understood from the perspectives of those you are studying—surveys can be limited by the way they almost inevitably guide and limit participants’ range of responses. Written surveys routinely reflect adults’ (or scholars’) categories.

Interviews too, particularly if they are tightly scripted rather than exploratory, can also overly reflect interviewers’ categories rather than what interviewees could share (Briggs 1986), but in this circumstance the interviews were vehicles to confirm, correct, and/or elaborate on individual responses offered in surveys, as Noemi’s “Phoenix” response exemplifies. As such, they were a reminder that what is recorded on the surveys may, at least on occasion, be misleading, unnecessarily skipped, or incomplete. Among the rationales for interviewing transnational students is a reliability check regarding the survey answers—would students offer the same answer orally as they had in writing? But it is not clear from the discrepancies reviewed here that reliability was the most important dimension to consider. Noemi’s “Phoenix” was still more generated because of what we were looking for (where had she gone to school) than by anything she was hoping we would understand.

Sayra, Marisol, and Ana Karen all suggest that asking about first language might be a misleading question for some transnational students, as their bilingualism refutes the idea that one of their languages or the other is primary. José Luis’s answers are a reminder that student responses can reflect not necessarily what they think but rather what they calculate the question asker wants to hear. It does not seem to us that surveys are more likely to produce “aim-to-please” answers than interviews, but the juxtaposition of asking in one format and then another might make it more likely that an “aim-to-please” response is revealed as such. What is important to remember is that both survey and interview responses may capture the respondent’s calculation regarding what he/she thinks s/he is supposed to say. This too may reflect an element of cosmology. The child’s response is not primarily to meet the needs of a social scientist (or oppose them) but rather to meet the child’s interpretation of what is supposed to be offered in the survey or interview data-gathering situation. Most of the time, the gap between researchers’ and children’s intentions may not be a source for significant discrepancy, but sometimes, as suggested here, it might.

Transnational students may be the only ones who know what their experiences have been of living in communities and homes and going to school in two countries. As such



they are uniquely positioned to offer insight on dimensions of both migration and schooling that cannot otherwise be readily examined. Yet this point that they are the best source does not mean they are a perfect source. There is no perfect source in research like this (and the binary of perfect vs. imperfect creates its own limitations). On the other hand, this may be the key point: what we want them to tell us may not be the only kind of information that they can share and that we should hear. There is a morality at the core of anthropology that asserts that how others live and think matters. By this axiom, allowing space for research participants to take some control of the communication then becomes crucial for realization of this end.

Researchers almost always are adults. They are used to overlooking children's versions of the social world, likely for a variety of reasons, but no doubt included among them is the fact that, with the occasional and exciting exceptions of youth participatory-action research (Camarota and Fine 2008), children are almost always excluded from the world of researchers except as "objects of information" rather than "subjects of communication" (Foucault 1977:200). Written by three authors with an average age of more than 50, superficially this paper continues this frequent limitation. We too are adults talking about children. However, if we listen to what they are saying, if we move away from (or at least complement) the fixed categories of our surveys to the more free-ranging give and take of loosely structured interviews, if we prioritize capturing the emic, we can produce something richer than just descriptive statistics about children. Instead, we can acknowledge children complicating our questions—be they about first languages or reasons for their transnational mobility. Certainly, children's versions of events are fragmentary and sometimes contradictory. However, social realities are also fragmentary and contradictory. Like an asymptote, we can get closer to depicting what cannot be fully depicted—children's experiences of transnational lives and schooling—if we let them clarify, amplify, or elaborate on what they know.

But the strength of our inquiry is not just anthropological; the historical, demographic, educational, political, and sociological all also pertain and can be discerned in our inquiry. Our argument here is that (1) yes, anthropology matters for understanding what these children negotiate, understand, and experience, but (2) in asserting a role for anthropology, we do not need to categorize this as anthropological only. Mexico's Secretaría de Educación Pública would not have funded the third phase of this inquiry if it thought that our work was strictly anthropological. After all, theirs is not a research charge. Rather, they have the responsibility to organize instruction for millions of children in their country's schools, including supporting the inquiry that will support up-to-date teacher preparation and in-service training to best serve the current heterogeneous enrollment. Similarly, the schools would have been more reluctant in their welcome if they saw our work as strictly anthropological. Instead they saw our interdisciplinary team (sociologist, anthropologist, and teacher educator)

and our funding sources and logistic supporters (we collaborated with state departments of education in each state of our study) and from that more holistic appraisal welcomed our efforts to better understand some of their students.

Finally, calling into question the completeness or intent of various survey-generated data is not a rejection of those data. Nor should we overinterpret oral-interview responses as definitive. If the examples shared here suggested that students sometimes had much more to say than they initially did, that they sometimes had different conceptualizations of what our questions were actually asking, and/or that they varied from each other even when answers seemed similar, the discrepancies emergent in our mixed-methods interdisciplinary inquiry push back against the definitive, positivistic interpretations that too often have marred social science. Anthropology is neither fully nor uniquely postpositivist, but in our view an important contemporary demeanor of the discipline is its humility rather than its hubris. We think that our studies merit dissemination, that they are relevant to teacher preparation and other policy applications (i.e., that they matter beyond the world of anthropology). Still, we hope, as our work is interpreted in those venues, that it is not mistranslated as definitive. There is no "best practice" for working with transnational students (although some practices are clearly more responsive than others). Anthropology says "listen" and "consider," but in that very act it also concedes its honest limitation. We are intermediaries to transnational children's multiple and varied cosmologies. We have captured enough of those views to know (1) that they do not fully match those of scholars and teachers and (2) that there is much, much more going on than just what we captured and depicted. That too is a contribution of anthropology to a larger interdisciplinary effort.

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