

Chapter 12

Gaming the System: Leveraging MMORPGs for Leveling– Up the Playing Field in Schools for Transnational Students

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ABSTRACT

This chapter highlights the potential and practical application of CALL and specifically the use of massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) for the language and identity socialization of transnational students. The authors focus on the educational trajectories of 1) children returnees and 2) international migrants who have lived and attended school in the U.S. and now have been uprooted to Mexico as a result of repatriation and/or deportation. The authors advocate creating blended affinity spaces at schools where youth can meet and play digital role-playing games. Game-ecology literacy development within these spaces is detailed through the sharing of game screen shots, blog posts, and the perspectives of transnational students that support this kind of learning within the EFL environment. The chapter concludes with a “call to action” and steps for educators to create such blended affinity spaces for gaming at schools.

*We are all longing to go **home** to some place **we have never been**—a place half-remembered and half-envisioned we can only catch glimpses of from time to time. **Community**. Somewhere, there are people to whom we can **speak with passion** without having the words catch in our throats. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to **receive us**, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever **we come into our own power**. Community means strength that joins **our strength** to do the work that*

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needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of friends. Someplace where we can be free (Starhawk, 1988, p. 92, emphasis added).

INTRODUCTION

Home, for the estimated 1.5 million transnational children caught in the historical circular migration pattern between the U.S. and Mexico border, can be, as Starhawk describes above, a half-remembered, half-envisioned place, that many have never seen, nor known. In the past decade, scholars have begun to bring to light the issues of these children's fractured schooling and traumatic experiences of trying to adapt to new countries, homes, and sociocultural practices that may be on the one hand in some ways connected to their heritage, but on the other hand vastly disconnected to their lived cultural and linguistic experiences (Medina & Menjívar, 2015; Zúñiga & Hamann, 2006, 2015; Zúñiga & Romero, 2014). These studies specifically have documented the experiences of 1. *children returnees*, or children who "were born in Mexico, eventually left to the U.S. (generally with their parents or at least one of them) and after some period of residency in the U.S., returned to Mexico" (Zúñiga & Vivas-Romero, 2014, p. 3) and 2. *international migrants*, who were born in the U.S., many attended school in the U.S., and then moved to Mexico as a result of repatriation and/or deportation (Zúñiga & Vivas-Romero, 2014). With the exception of the small group of researchers and their studies referenced throughout this chapter, the narratives of reverse migration and the voices of children returnees and international migrants, attending schools in Mexico, have not been heard with the same volume as those who remain in the U.S.; the generation 1.5 migrants who continue to attend U.S. schools (Zúñiga & Vivas-Romero, 2014). It can be estimated from the 2010 Mexican Population Census that 350,000 children returnees and 500,000 international migrants now reside in Mexico (Giorguli & Gutiérrez, 2011; Gonzales & Chavez, 2012; Zúñiga & Hamann, 2015). According to Zúñiga and Hamann's longitudinal survey studies, approximately 420,000 of these children have enrolled in Mexican schools, grades 1-9 alone, and that as many as 330,000 children were born in the United States (2015, p. 644; see also Zúñiga, 2012; Zúñiga & Hamann, 2006).

In this chapter, it is our goal not only to continue to share the experiences of these youth, but also to draw connections to the research in the U.S. on generation 1.5 migrants that shows how increased opportunities for these youth to participate in school-based, out-of-classroom activities have helped them 1) reposition themselves in the eyes of their teachers and peers, 2) develop positive identities, and 3) have success at school (Przymus, 2015, 2016). In comparing the experience of generation 1.5 youth in the U.S. to the context of transnational children in Mexico, we may be able to learn from and detail how this same reconceptualization of learning could be theorized through CALL practice and specifically the promotion of game-ecology language and identity socialization through a peer-facilitated intervention that would create gaming communities of practice in Mexican schools. The overall goal of this chapter is a call to action for educators, specifically in Mexico, but on both sides of the border, to conceptualize and work towards the creation of spaces for such gaming communities of practice at schools. Valuing the identity of transnational children as gamers could have an impact on creating more equitable, social, and educational experiences for these youth.

In making these connections, we merge research on how individuals form identities over time within language socialization processes (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), through participation in communities of practice (Thorne, Black, & Sykes, 2009; Wenger, 1998), linked to interest-based peer activities (Canagarajah, 2007; Przymus, 2015, 2016), with research on gaming and affinity spaces (Cornillie, Thorne,

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