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# CLPR Graduate Student Research Brief

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## AT HOME IN TWO PLACES: Second-Generation *Mexicanas* and Their Lives as Engaged Transnationals

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In the US today, children of immigrants comprise the fastest-growing segment of the under-eighteen population—one out of every five children is the child of immigrants. Additionally, the fastest growing group of children in U.S. public schools is Latino; over 60% of these Latino children are of immigrant stock.

Immigration today and the “new” second generation are increasingly part of broader processes that are often left out of discussions on public schooling. What many educators do not realize is that globalization and its macro-structural forces have changed the places and modes of incorporation for many recent immigrants affecting the demographics of many school districts.

In addition, immigration in the context of globalization means that immigrants can potentially live transnationally without having to sever ties to their countries of



origin. I use the notion of transnationalism to refer to a social process, in which transmigrants develop and maintain

“multiple relations”—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, etc.—across two or more societies. Unlike many European immigrants who came to the US at the turn of the century, immigrants today are able to carry out transnational lives because of “shorter” distances between the US and their natal communities.

While the geographic space remains the same between immigrant-sending countries and the US, telecommunications, airplane transportation, money-wiring services, improvements in basic infrastructure in home countries greatly reduce the time and space between immigrants and family back home.

Several Latino transmigrant groups, particularly *Mexicano* immigrants who sustain close ties to their homeland, have been living “transnationally” for decades. For the past three years (2000-2003), I have worked closely with a small group of second-generation *Mexicana* youth (ages 13-16) whose families maintain close ties to their

parents’ natal communities in Jalisco, México. For many of the immigrant members in these communities, sustained



transnationalism and return visits constitute a way to temper the U.S.’s subtractive process of assimilation. In addition, the transnational social spaces in which the young women participate offer a rich setting to closely examine gender roles and negotiation; the concepts of “family,” “discipline,” and “freedom”; as well as the “funds of knowledge” of transnational families and their accompanying invisibility in formal schooling processes.

In this study, I take a close look at what it means to come of age as second-generation *Mexicanas* engaged in transnationalism—with a particular emphasis on the role of family, gender, and place. The findings demonstrate how familial, social, religious practices intersect with both gender and the transnational social space, shaping both parenting strategies and the young women’s lives. Through this work, both educators and the policymaking sphere can come to understand how immigrant children in our public schools are reaching beyond the local and forging relationships on a broader, global scale.

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*Patricia Sánchez* was a Mini-grant recipient in Spring 2001.

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