

Generaciones' Narratives: The Pursuit and Practice of Traditional and Electronic Literacies on the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, by John Scenters-Zapico. Logan: Utah State UP/Computers and Composition Digital Press, 2010. 265 pp.

Reviewed by Sally Chandler, Kean University

Generaciones' Narratives, (Computers and Composition Digital Press, <http://ccdigitalpress.org>), presents the everyday literacy experiences of residents from El Paso, Texas, and Juárez, Mexico—borderlands of the Rio Grande. The book's 43 narratives are organized into chapters featuring five generational cohorts born between 1921 and 1985. Taken together, these stories illustrate how changing social, political and material landscapes correlate with the literate lives within each generation. For example, Angelica, born in the 1950s, recalls the boundary between El Paso and Juárez as practically invisible. For her, it was as if "El Paso was more of a continuation of Juárez—it was the same thing" (63). Participants born in the early 1980s came of age in the same geographic place but under different economic and political circumstances. Fear fed by international drug wars and 9/11 led to passage of The Border Protection Act of 2005 and lives spanning the border no longer felt like "a continuation." Despite these changes, residents continued to cross and redefine cultural boundaries, often in ways that were difficult to observe. According to Scenters-Zapico, "ecological factors relevant to literacies of Spanish, English, and Spanglish . . . complicate the local literacy data. . . . Unfortunately, outside researchers do not know or consider [Juárez and El Paso's] intertwined, intercultural history" (5). This book helps make these culturally complex literacies visible.

Generaciones' Narratives begins by supplementing terminology developed in earlier literacy narrative research. New terms better describe the behaviors and interactions Scenters-Zapico observed, and allow for differentiation among forms of sponsorship and gateways; they differentiate between positive and negative, local and pervasive effects within cultural ecologies. This new, hybrid language allows more nuanced analysis of literate lives in general, and of lives along the border in particular. Chapters that follow offer a chronological presentation of stories by the five generational cohorts: individuals born between 1920-50; 1951-60; 1961-70; 1971-80; and 1981-85. Each chapter includes five to eight narratives and begins with a chart listing narrators' birthplace, migrations, and current residence. The charts intimate what the stories make clear: participants' lives cross and re-cross boundaries between countries, cultures, and languages in ways that demand nontraditional descriptions of their relationships to literacies and communication technologies.

Chapter 1 presents stories told by the cohort born from 1920-50. A central concern for this generation was how to learn the “business” language of English and still remain rooted in home language and culture. For U.S. residents, English was taught at school, and the need for lessons in Spanish led to the teaching of traditional literacies in nontraditional ways—through reading comics, magazines, and the Bible. Alicia, a participant who grew up in El Paso, reported regular family trips to Juárez where she read street signs in Spanish (49). Scenters-Zapico identifies such pedagogical practices as culturally and linguistically rich, and adds that they represent largely unrecognized paths to literacy. Chapter 1 also reports the effects of gender bias on literacies, and documents its receding influence as women move from childhood to maturity. Alicia’s early participation in education was restricted by her father, who insisted she help at home and in the cotton fields; as an adult, Alicia’s daughter encouraged her to attend school so she could learn to use a computer and get a better job (49). Such stories emphasize family members as indirect sponsors, and illustrate how increased literacy—and equality—are often driven as much by economics as by social consciousness.

Stories from chapter 2, as well as chapters that follow, emphasize the importance of intergenerational literacy sponsorship. The older generations most frequently supported traditional literacies, but it was primarily the younger generations who introduced elders to digital communication. In these stories, the direct and indirect sponsorships and the learning they engender are not simple, and they often have multilingual components: Laura, born in 1960, grew up in El Paso but had strong cultural connections to Juárez. Spanish was her home language, and as a child she remembered her mother “translating everything she could get her hands on” as a way to learn English, and she became involved in these translations (71). Scenters-Zapico points out that “this extremely complicated biculturalism and bilingualism would not appear in any national literacy measure. Such extraordinary and alternative practices, because they are situated and contextual, most likely are unknown to researchers” (72).

Both chapters 2 and 3 explore participants’ use of “cubbyhole gateways”—positions or circumstances that provided indirect or partial access to literacies (23). Cubbyhole gateways often took the form of what is usually thought of as a dead-end job—a position working as cashier or big-box store clerk. Such jobs provide opportunities to gain basic familiarity and confidence with new technologies and are particularly important for individuals who must work their way toward digital literacy. In some instances they provide basic, step-by-step instruction that “older” generations continue to crave. Andrea Ramirez, born in 1965, describes herself as feeling that “younger friends learned to use computers ‘the right way,’ that is, through direct sponsorship, not ‘trial and error like her’” (93). Scenters-Zapico points out individuals born in the 1960s may be the last generation to want this kind of traditional sponsorship and teaching for electronic literacies.

Chapters 4 and 5 tell stories from generations who came of age with digital technologies and the internet. For some of these participants, such as Gerardo in chapter 4, engagement with technology started as a pastime and only later developed into an asset engendering economic opportunity. Gerardo's home language is Spanish, and bilingualism not only came late in life—it was directly related to his job at the Information Technology desk at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) (120). Stories from these chapters also emphasize the changing face of the border. Francisco, from chapter 5, grew up in Mexico but was living in El Paso and going to school at UTEP at the time of his interview. He indicated that “the struggle is to take the computer you just have buy in the U.S. and take it to Mexico, without the soldiers taking it away from you . . .” (158). His narrative represented bringing identities across the border as equally difficult. Like other participants who went to school in Mexico, Francisco attended schools segregated by class—and by nationality. Americanos who were culturally Mexican often lived in Juarez so their children could learn their home culture and language at school. Francisco remembers that in grade school “there were fights between Mexicans and Americans, and in sports, the teachers put always Americans against Mexicans” (158).

Many circumstances of literate learning described in *Generaciones' Narratives* will not be accounted for in government sponsored literacy research—and government research provides the “facts” that drive educational policies and funding, as well as cultural stereotypes. Without adequate understanding of these multicultural lives, the contributions and needs of multilingual learners from the borderlands will remain invisible.

Scenters-Zapico's work is the first book-length scholarship to capitalize on the unique possibilities multimedia offers for representing literate lives. *Generaciones' Narratives* integrates two multimedia features into traditional literacy narratives: embedded videos and mouse-over translations. The videos generally present static shots of participants seated in a chair. Older generations often speak from their transcript, while younger participants swivel the chair, talk with their hands, and lean into the conversation. Reading the printed text without watching the videos misses important cues for understanding the participants' lives. The audio-visual representations introduce rich ground for multiple, complex interpretations that will not necessarily be accessible through the text. For example, Scenters-Zapico responds to Angelica's representation of the seamless border by commenting that times have changed. In the text, the deepening divide between Mexico and the United States takes on the status of fact, but the subtleties of Angelica's embodied response offer a more complicated assessment. Given enough time and attention, study of such subtleties will revise the language and ideologies that make them invisible. Despite the advantages of digital representation, there are also annoyances, and browser choice can affect the reading experience. Internet Explorer provided the most seamless reading

experience; Firefox also worked well, but while Google Chrome loaded the text (slowly) it did not allow access to mouseover and video features.

Scenters-Zapico's ebook not only provides rich, detailed data that can fill in gaps about literacy learning, it supplements existing theoretical frames with terminology necessary for accounting for what and how borderland residents experience literacy learning. Finally and perhaps most importantly, even though future scholarship will certainly find new ways to use multimedia, this work has helped to establish conventions and suggest possibilities.

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RAW (Reading and Writing) New Media, edited by Cheryl E. Ball and James Kalmbach. Cresskill: Hampton P, 2010. 372 pp.

Reviewed by Stephanie Vie, Fort Lewis College

This was not the book I expected, but I'm glad. Ball and Kalmbach, both of Illinois State University, are prominent rhetoric and composition scholars and Ball in particular has published widely on new media. Thus I anticipated a volume grounded in rhetoric and composition with a largely pedagogical bent. With these expectations in mind, I was pleasantly confronted by something different: material drawn not just from rhetoric and composition, not solely practical, but instead encompassing theory and praxis from a variety of authors and fields. Indeed, the introduction reframed my expectations; the editors described their academic paths as ones that began "with the literary and poetic . . . our early scholarly connections to creative writing were tied to new media in ways we could not foresee" (3). By incorporating multiple voices and perspectives, *RAW New Media* is more compelling, richer than if it had conformed to my initially narrow expectations.

The introduction shares the inspiration for the unusual title: walking in Louisville, Ball suddenly noticed a sign near a sushi bar that simply said RAW. She had walked past it before but never noticed it, now seeing that moment as a "serendipitous connection to how we view new media—materially rich, changing and remediating itself, some readers needing a moment to bring its meaning to light, becoming new again and again" (4). Thus, the book resists a monolithic definition of new media, instead allowing the individual authors to relate their own definitions. This resistance to one uniform definition as well as its breadth—twenty-one chapters that vary widely in their approach—makes the collection useful for scholars not aligned with rhetoric and composition. However, it certainly proves valuable for those in composition studies and ideally situated for courses in new media, computers and composition, and/or multimodal composing.