EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN IN THE MIGRANT STREAM:
ECOLOGICAL FACTORS NECESSARY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

José P. Salinas

A Dissertation

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Committee:

Mark A. Earley, Advisor

Ruben P. Viramontez Anguiano,
Graduate Faculty Representative

Michael Reed

Patrick Pauken

Judy Zimmerman
This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Title I – Part C, migrant education programs in Ohio. Limited research has been conducted on the migrant educational experience and the ecological factors for academic success. The present life history study investigated educational experiences, family culture, and community connections of six adult Latinos/as who followed the migrant stream with their parents to obtain qualifying agricultural work. Interviews, data collection, and audio-recording were utilized for this research. Based on the qualitative data analysis, a conceptual model was created to illustrate how academic success was dependent on students’ nurturing educational experiences throughout their school-age years. The conceptual model also shows how social capital and strong familial sociocentric values were extremely important to student performance. These themes resulted in a set of culturally proficient based recommendations for leaders.
This dissertation is dedicated to God who has blessed me with so much. God blessed with my wife Alma and my children Joey and Antonio who loved and supported me unconditionally throughout my doctoral experience.

God blessed me with my father, “Jose grande” who was my moral compass and provided me valuable consejos which I now pass along to my children.

and

God blessed me with my mother, Maudelia Salinas, who died one year before the completion of this dissertation…

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Overview

**Bittersweet Images**
by Jose Salinas

A migrant: overworked, underpaid, under-educated, in search of “Dick and Jane.” A migrant takes pride in his family; above all, takes pride in his work: what other choice does he have?

Long hours go by as we fill our hampers, one after the other trying to meet our quota. Sweet images of hopes and dreams fill our heads to give us something to look forward to: in reality, only to keep us from getting bored.

The scorching sun in the late afternoon is but a course, a curse put upon our bodies by the evilness of work. And a gust of wind is but a blessing from the heavens, a blessing from God: it only lasts a second or two.

Our tired bones ache from the seemingly long summer months of hard core, back-breaking labor. Joy, the last paycheck! A sign symbolizing the end of grueling work: a sign symbolizing future unemployment and despair.

My parents, my dear parents, you are but too old and too tired for any further laboring. I will, with dignity and obligation, take care of you at your old age: when I fail, please forgive me for I am only a migrant.

According to the National Agricultural Worker Survey report published by Carroll, Samardick, Bernard, Gabbard and Hernandez (2005) for the U.S. Department of Labor, there is plenty we know today about the average migrant farmworker. In their survey of 6,472 workers in a 12-month span from 2001-2002, we know that the average migrant worker is 33 years old (both male and female), was born in Mexico, the mean highest grade completed was a seventh grade education, averages an individual income between $10,000 and $12,000, and has an average of two children. Because of the low wages associated with migrant agricultural farm work, children’s involvement in the cultivation and harvesting of crops has been a substantial economic contribution to the family’s sustenance (Donato, 2003). Children between the ages of 14-17 make up three percent of the total crop workers (Carroll, Samardick, Bernard, Gabbard & Hernandez, 2005) or 169,00 to 200,00 youth according to the U.S. General Accounting Office (1998). Studies have claimed that some children begin working with their parents as young as four or five years old (Cranston-Gingras, 2003). Children will contribute immensely in various other ways including babysitting younger siblings and doing family-related chores (Phineey, Ong, & Madden, 2000; Tseng, 2004).

Prior to the 1960s, however, statistical and demographic information available on migrant farmworkers was scarce. There was little concern nationally over the low achievement of Mexican American migrant children in the public schools (Donato, 2003). “Over 90 percent of Mexican American youth did not make it to high school and less than one percent left with diplomas… the education of Mexican Americans changed very little during the first half of the 20th century” (p. 85). In 1964, then President Lyndon B. Johnson announced his war on poverty through his Great Society initiative (Skidmore, 2004; Wright, 1996). Johnson, who himself had spent a year as a laborer in California, allocated funds to the U.S. Department of Education
targeted specifically for improving academic gains of migrant children, and in 1967 the first migrant education programs were initiated (Seligmann, 1998). Through migrant education, states were eligible for funds to be used exclusively for providing educational summer school programs, where migrant children were given the opportunity to regain the content knowledge they had lost through frequent school interruptions. Each state is either a “homebase” state or a “receiving” state. A homebase state is the state migrant families consider home. A receiving state is where families move to temporarily to seek migratory work.

The U.S. Department of Education (2003) defines a migratory child as a child under the age of 22 who has not graduated from high school and who has made an interstate or intrastate move with parents in search of agricultural work within the last 36 months. Depending on the types of agricultural work individual families prefer, there is a migratory pattern they will typically follow that will lead them to those specific jobs. Also called the migrant stream, this transitory route is usually dictated by the seasonal work the individual or family will engage in each year. Three basic migrant streams exist encompassing the entire United States: the Eastern, Midwestern, and Western.

During a 12-month period, migrant students who eventually end up in Northwest Ohio typically start their migratory experience in their home-base school in Texas or Florida. In March, many of these migrant students will find themselves abruptly withdrawing from school to travel with their parents to Georgia for the onion harvest or to South Carolina for the cherry tomato harvest. Upon their arrival, the family is given their housing assignment where they will live for the remainder of the season. The conditions of these houses are usually appalling, consisting of poor plumbing, and at times infested with rodents. Migrant children are soon enrolled in their new schools and expected to immediately acclimate to their new environment.
They are faced with the challenge of making new friends, getting used to their new textbooks, and catching up academically to the rest of their new classmates. Just as these students are finally adapting to their new environment, they are again abruptly withdrawn from school in May to move with their families to Northwest Ohio where once again they are faced with the same deplorable housing situations. Migrant students are enrolled in their new schools where they again are expected to acclimate to another new environment and struggle to catch up academically to the rest of their peers. Before any educational gains can be made, the school year comes to an end.

In the summer time, migrant children age 12 can legally work in the fields like adults. They harvest cucumbers and tomatoes along side their parents in the hot sun while most American children are playing, enjoying their summer break. Migrant families will get a visit by a migrant recruiter hired by the school district who will enroll eligible migrant children into a summer migrant education program which usually begins in mid-June and lasts for about six to eight weeks. Funded through U.S. Department of Education’s Title I-Part C grant, the program targets children ages three to 21 that have not yet completed school. These migrant education programs provide migrant students a safe educational environment during the summer where they are protected from the dangers of farm equipment and harmful pesticides. Students are bussed to a school building for the length of a regular school day. While in the program, teachers work on the educational needs of students giving them the opportunity to develop the academic skills they may be lacking as a result of one or multiple school interruptions experienced that year.

Before long, summer comes to an end and the new school year begins. The tomato harvest continues for a few more weeks while certain farms prepare for the apple and pumpkin
season. Migrant students start their first day of class like everyone else and for once they mix in well with the rest of the student population as everyone strives to make friends and get accustomed to their new classroom environment. The start of the new school year brings great hope to many migrant students. They begin at the same level as their classmates and struggle to not be left behind. But for those students age 12 and older, homework is secondary to their responsibility of joining their parents in the fields after school, sometimes working late into the evening. Finding the time and place to complete assignments can be a real challenge, and parental tutoring at home is usually never an option because most parents have little to no formal education. Many are illiterate and know only simple mathematical functions.

By mid-October most of the migrant agricultural activities are over and the majority of the migrant students have been withdrawn from school in Ohio and enrolled back in their home-base school in Texas or Florida. Students will once again struggle to acclimate to their new class schedules, but will be expected to start at the same course content level as the rest of their peers. Thus begins the first of various other school interruptions they will experience the rest of that school year. It is important to mention, however, that changes in recent Ohio migrant demographics indicate that more undocumented migrant workers are coming from Mexico than from all other U.S. states combined. The experiences of undocumented migrant children are unique and present an entirely different migrant systems perspective. Therefore, the undocumented population will not be incorporated in this research.

Background of the Problem

The very nature of the migratory experience makes serving migrant children a very difficult undertaking for teachers and school administrators. Various ecological factors have been explored in the literature to explain low achievement and other educational deficiencies in
migrant students. The literature also includes studies to explore certain factors that contribute to the resiliency and other high achieving characteristics in migrant students. However, very little research has been done to examine ecological factors from the perspective of high academic migrant achievers and low academic migrant achievers to understand outcomes. An analysis of their life histories can offer valuable insight into how and why certain ecological factors like school experiences, family culture, and community connections affect migrant students differently.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this life history study will be to explore school, family, and community influences on the educational outcomes of six adult Latinos in Northwest Ohio who followed the migrant stream as children.

Guiding Research Questions

1.) What were the educational experiences of Latino adults who grew up in the migrant stream?
2.) How did parents contribute to the educational process?
3.) How did the family cope with change after a migratory move?
4.) What community resources were important to migrant families?
5.) How did school, family, and community impact children who grew up in the migrant stream?

Significance of the Study

I will investigate the experiences Latino adults had as migrant children to study the ecological factors that influenced their educational outcomes. I will examine how certain barriers individually impacted each participant and how some were able to overcome these obstacles
while others were drastically impeded by them. The results of this research will enable leaders and policy makers to make better informed decisions in providing optimal educational opportunities for their Latino migrant student population.

Definitions of Terms

_Latino/a, Chicano/a, Mexican and Hispanic_ will be used interchangeably depending on the term the authors use in the literature.

_Migrants or Farmworkers_ is defined by Gouwens (2001) as “seasonal workers in agriculture, fishing, forestry, and plant nurseries; they travel from job to job as the seasons change and as work becomes available” (p. 3) and will used interchangeable for the purpose of this study.

_Migrant Education Program_ is an educational program exclusively for migrant students administered by the school district and funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Title I – Part C.

_Migrant Streams_ are the traditional migratory routes taken by migrant farm workers in search of qualifying work. These include the Eastern, Midwestern and Western Migrant Streams. See Figure 1 below.
It is important to point out that migration is dictated by social, cultural, geographical, familial, and economic factors. Therefore, straight-line migration is not typical of the route migrant families take. There is often a blending, or a cross-over of streams. The illustration above is the best estimate of the migratory streams.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

In recent years, there has been a major shift in the demographics of migrant farmworkers. While the U.S. continues to experience a need for migrant workers for the vast quantity of agricultural farm work available nationwide, undocumented workers make up a significantly large portion of the farm labor workforce which according to Orrick (2005) was approximately 1.5 million in 2005. In the fiscal year of 2001-2002, about 53 percent of the total migrant population in the United States was made up of unauthorized workers (Carroll, Samardick, Bernard, Gabbard & Hernandez, 2005). This group is replacing many U.S. born migrant workers who each year leave the migrant lifestyle in search of more permanent, higher paying jobs. Many
of these new workers are recent arrivals from Mexico and Central America who often enter the United States illegally. The participants for this study will be delimited to 6 Latino adults from Northwest Ohio who were American-born, or who became American citizens during their school-age years. Although an undocumented child has a right to a free public education (Plyler v. Doe, 1982), this right does not apply to institutions of higher education. Therefore, a graduating high school student who is not a legal resident of this country and does not possess a Social Security number can not apply for the federal grants and loans necessary to afford the high tuition costs at most U.S. colleges or universities. These and other factors associated with the undocumented experience are important to the literature and would make a great study. However, for this study I will be analyzing the choices the participants made against the choices the participants had while in school. Therefore, it is imperative for this study that the participants’ choice to have gone to college during their experience in the public school system was not inhibited by restrictive federal policies similar to those currently affecting the undocumented population. For this reason I have decided to limit my participant group to include only U.S. born individuals who lived the migrant experience as children.
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Research shows that Latino students have repeatedly demonstrated academic achievement in the classroom in the midst of disparities between the home culture and that of mainstream schools (Weisner, Ryan, Reese, Kresen, Bernheimer & Galimore, 2001). Unfortunately, differing contextual views of education can still become a major disruption in the educational process for Latinos (Behnke, Piercy & Diversi, 2004). However, finding research on how individual Latino subgroups are specifically affected by these disparities can be an enormous undertaking. By grouping Latinos into one homogeneous cluster, important information about subgroups is lost. People from the same race who may share many of the same cultural norms can also react differently in their daily existence because of the varied knowledge that is unique to their experiences (Tapia, 1998). The Mexican-American migrant farmworker population is an example of a specific subgroup with unique experiences in part by the nature of their work and the vast distances they will travel to obtain it. These and other factors present multiple implications that do not exist in the broader Latino context. “Due to the growing representations of Latinos in the United States, researchers and practitioners will need more information about these ethnic group members to be adequately prepared to understand their development and psychological adjustment” (Umaña-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002, p. 303). Although general information on U.S. Latinos will be used where migrant-specific data is lacking, this study will center specifically on the Mexican-American migrant farmworker experience. In particular, this chapter will present a summary of the literature associated with the migrant educational experience from a cultural, familial, and community context.
Migrant Children in the U.S.

According to the Migrant Education Program Annual Report (ED-01-CO-0033/0002, 2006) there were 783,867 eligible migrant children identified during the 1998-99 fiscal year while 872,732 were identified in 2001-02; an increase of 88,865 students (p. 4). In 1998-99, 22 percent of migrant students were limited English proficient which increased to 34 percent by 2001-02 (p. 10). During the 2001-02 count, Texas had the second largest number of migrant children at 138,176 and Florida came in third with 53,108 while California held the highest count of all with 276,140 students (p. 8). In the same year, 89 percent of the total eligible migrant student population was Hispanic, six percent White, and two percent Black (2006). The migrant student dropout rate, however, is difficult to estimate due to changing demographics and the transitory nature of the population (Perry, 1997). For example, the dropout rate for migrant students in 1975 was estimated to be at 90 percent according to the study *Evaluation of the Impact of ESEA Title I Programs for Migrant Children of Migrant Agricultural Workers* (1974) while in a separate study several years later entitled *Migrant Attrition Project* (1987), the dropout rate was reported at 45 percent. Although this information appears inconsistent in the literature, the dropout rate for migrant students is still significantly higher when compared to other high risk populations (Martinez & Cranston-Gingras, 1996).

The legal minimum age at which children are allowed to work in agricultural related labor is 12 years old (Fair Labor Standards Act, 2007). However, some children have been known to begin working with their parents as young as four or five years old (Cranston-Gingras, 2003). And although correlations can be made between children’s heavy work schedules and the high migrant dropout rate, studies have also found serious health concerns among children who work in agriculture at a very young age. Migrant children are confronted with higher incidences
of disease and illnesses than mainstream children (Perry, 1997). According to Mull (1993) 48 percent of migrant children reported being sprayed with pesticides while working in the fields. Furthermore, studies on the affects of long term exposure to agricultural chemicals like fertilizers and pesticides show significant health consequences on the human body (Gouwens, 2001). Arcury and Quandt (1998) found that cancer is one delayed affect of long term exposure to these harmful chemicals. The types of common cancers include leukemia and cancer of the skin among others (Blair & Zahm, 1995). Unfortunately, no data was found in the literature on the number of migrant farmworkers who die from exposure to harmful chemicals applied to the various kinds of crops harvested although many who have died of cancer show no family history of the disease. Additionally, Martinez and Cranston-Gingras (1996) claim that the infant mortality rate among migrant families is around 25 percent higher than the national average. Just as alarming are the 300 children who die each year from agricultural related accidents (Mull, 1993).

Educational Barriers

There are approximately 2.3 million children in the U.S. who can not speak English in school (Schnailberg, 97). For Latinos, language has always been a major barrier towards academic success (Coatesworth, Pantin, & Szapocznik, 2002; Nieto, 2004) and affects children at various levels. Although a Latino family may take pride in raising a bilingual child, the home language is often not valued in the American monolingual mainstream society (Portes & Hao, 2002). As a result, children will adopt specific speaking patterns reflecting their experiences and their surroundings (Ingoldsby & Smith, 2005). “These patterns include speaking only English, speaking mostly English but understanding Spanish, bilingual fluency varying by individual, or speaking ‘Spanglish,’ a combination of Spanish and English” (Ingoldsby & Smith, 2005, p. 217).
However, the students experiencing the greatest difficulty are those with little to no English speaking abilities. No where is this more obvious than in the public school setting, especially in the Southeast and Northwest where Latino immigrants have only recently begun populating in greater number (Ingoldsby & Smith, 2005). The K-12 system in general is not prepared to handle the large number of Latinos moving into these areas (Rodriguez, 2004). When migrant students enroll in a new school and are assessed to measure their English language fluency, school officials often discover that many arrive with limited English proficiency as they struggle to figure out what to do with them educationally. School districts are obligated under the law to provide adequate instruction to students with language barriers during the regular school year (Castaneda v. Pickard, 1981; Lau v. Nichols, 1974). In reality, many school districts find themselves strapped for funds and struggle to provide sufficient academic support services and resources to their limited English proficient (LEP) population. And in many school districts across the country, teachers lack sufficient language and cultural competency to connect with non-mainstream student populations (Perry, 1997). As a result, minorities often bear the responsibility of acquiring the cultural knowledge of the mainstream society for survival and to gain educational advantages in school (Vasquez, 2003).

According to Ogbu (1987) the American public school system reflects White middle class norms which fail to take into account the differing realities of this nation’s minority subgroups. It is a constant challenge for Latinos in education particularly because of language and cultural differences that conflict with mainstream society (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Valdés, 1997). The lack of cohesion between cultures is referred to as cultural discontinuity and is found to have a direct negative affect on academic success when it exists between home and school (Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006). This cultural discontinuity and segregation can be observed in the
school setting as the migrant culture intersects with the prevailing mainstream curriculum resulting in educational discontinuity and disadvantaged students (Artze, 2000; Contreras & Valverde, 1994). For instance, one common expectation teachers have is that homework assignments sent home with students will be completed with parental guidance and support. However, this mainstream norm often conflicts with certain cultural and socioeconomic realities where parents may not have the language, content knowledge, or resources necessary to provide adequate academic assistance and guidance at home (Perry, 1997).

On the other hand, Duran (2003) in a recent study alleges that although parents are limited in the academic direction they can provide at home, homework assignments can offer significant benefits to parents if the schoolwork assignments can be understood by both student and parent.

With this knowledge, it should be possible to design interactive curricula that will help children learn school subject matter, and at the same time develop in their parents the grammatical forms of English that in the past have seemed so elusive. (p. 328)

Furthermore, by incorporating resources and materials that provide migrant children and their parents a means to proudly express their migrant culture and heritage engages the whole family in the education process (Whittaker, Salend & Gutierrez, 1997).

Continuous school interruptions are part of the migrant student reality and have a negative impact on academic success in school (Perry, 1997). “The reasons for the lack of education among migrant workers are many, but the migrant lifestyle’s high mobility serves as the greatest impediment to educational success” (Romanowski, 2003, p. 27). Secondary credit accrual problems resulting from constant school interruptions are common among high school migrant students (Garza, Reyes, & Trueba, 2004). Migrant students, because of their transitory
nature, will often encounter barriers to completing the required course to graduate from high school. For example, a migrant high school student who transfers to a different state in the middle of the school year may discover distinct graduation requirements between the states. Many times one state will not offer a course that another state requires for graduation. Other times, counselors are not aware of the graduation requirements of the students’ homebase school and a course schedule is assigned that does not benefit the student disrupting their progress toward graduation. Additionally, when migrant students enroll into a new school in the middle of the year, course selections may be slim due to limits on classroom size and other similar factors (Cranston-Gingras & Anderson, 1990). As a result, some migrant students are many times denied the courses they require for graduation. Furthermore, students who are regularly relocated to new school districts lose the continuity in their education and therefore interfering with the progress they are expected to make each year. Gouwens (2001) suggests that schools that serve migrant students engage in interstate coordination practices to ensure students succeed academically and graduate from school on time. The Secondary Credit Exchange Program established in 1970 was designed exclusively for the purpose of encouraging states to share student records (Cranston-Gingras & Anderson, 1990).

Another educational disruption is family economic factor. “Low income and poverty translate to fewer resources available to the young to assist the growing numbers of ancianos needing help” (Montoya, 1997, p. 6). More importantly, the family’s economic stability is essential to afford the financial responsibilities for educating a child which include the extra curricular activities that cost extra. Cordero-Guzman (2005) states that “close to 7.2 million Latinos, or 21%, live below the poverty level compared to 11% for the total U.S. population. Latino/a children are particularly likely to live under poverty” (p. 158). Tapia (2004) claims that
there is a direct link between financial stability and student success in the classroom, stating that “family stability, which is greatly influenced by economic stability, is the most important factor influencing student’s academic performance. This variable outweighs language and method of instruction” (p. 20). Waller and Crawford (2001) maintain that “the present farm worker system forces children to spend their lives in cruel poverty, pays little attention to health and safety standards, and locks people into a lifetime of menial, backbreaking work. To break this vicious cycle of poverty and despair, strong intervention is required” (p. 24).

Academic and Support Programs for Migrant Students

*Migrant Head Start*

School readiness programs like Head Start provide the social development and strong academic foundation that will greatly impact the success they have in the public school system (Fuentes & Cantu, 1996). “One of the major surviving battalions of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty, Head Start provides comprehensive early childhood education for the nation’s poorest children” (Mills, 1998, p. 27). Although a strong case is made in the literature for head start and preschool programs, significantly few Latino parents enroll their children in these programs. “Among families using non-parental care, just 39 percent of Latino families choose a formal center or preschool, compared with 58 percent of black and 54 percent of white families” (Fuller & Eggers-Pierola, 1996). In another study, Cordero-Guzman (2005) found that in 1999, “26% of Latino/a 3-year-olds, 64% of 4-year-olds, and 89% of 5-year-olds were enrolled in a center-based program or kindergarten compared to 60%, 81%, and 99 % of Black children and 47%, 69%, and 93% of White children” (p. 159).

Transitioning from head start to kindergarten is a stressful experience for young children, especially for those who enter a new culture (Waxler & Thompson, 1990). Migrant families with
children from newborn to age five have access to free federally funded migrant head start programs. Approximately 34,000 migrant children enrolled in a migrant head start program during a 12-month time period between 1993 and 1994 (Fuentes and Cantu, 1996). These programs do not just provide babysitting for parents who labor long hours in the fields. Children receive appropriate social and educational attention as they develop over the time period they are enrolled in the migrant head start (Mills, 1998). Additionally, children in the migrant head start program receive free meals and snack as required under the USDA’s Child Care Food Program (Wig, 1990).

*Migrant Education Programs for the School-age Student*

One common experience that many migrant children share is their participation in a migrant education program (MEP) sometime during their school age years where the educational instruction is focused exclusively on the individual needs and interests of the students in the program (ED-01-CO-0033/0002, 2006). MEPs grants are federally funded through Title I - Part C, of the No Child Left Behind Act. School districts with a sizeable migrant student population can apply for a subcontract through their state departments of education to administer an MEP and provide direct services to migrant children in their district or region (Gouwens, 2001). Employers benefit because the MEP provides quality child care services in the summer allowing workers to concentrate on quality crop production (Perry, 1997). MEP funds can also be used to hire recruiters who are responsible for the identification and recruitment of eligible migrant children.

The MEP administrator is careful to select teacher and other key staff who demonstrate the language and cultural knowledge. They must demonstrate passion and have high expectations for migrant students (Perry, 1997). Perry also suggests that when teachers are inadequate in these
areas, it is necessary to find a support staff that possesses these skills. Schools should consider hiring bilingual liaisons to bridge the language and cultural divide between parents and teachers which produces parents who are better informed and teachers who feel they can communicate openly with their students’ parents (McLaughlin, Liljestrom, Lim, & Myers, 2002). Migrant education programs are designed to bridge the gap between schools and migrant parents to accomplish such objectives. According to Gouwens (2001) “summer migrant programs offer many migrant children, youth, and their families the opportunity to fill some of the academic gaps that have resulted from their mobility” (p. 105).

The Portable Assisted Study Sequence (PASS) and the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) are examples of how migrant education programs are organized to meet the educational needs of migrant students. PASS is a correspondence-type course that migrant students use regularly as an alternative way to earning secondary credit over the summer months (Cranston-Gingras & Anderson, 1990). The course arrives in a box as a kit and the student works independently under the direction of a certified teacher who monitors the student’s progress by phone and through the mail. If students successfully complete the course work and pass the required exams, they can earn high school credit towards that particular course. The HEP is a valuable federally funded retrieval program with the intent of helping migrant youth who have dropped out of school to earn the equivalent of a high school diploma (Cranston-Gingras, 1990). Approximately 70 percent of students who complete the HEP program continue on to a post secondary educational setting or seek employment outside of migrant agricultural work (National HEP/CAMP Association, 1999).
The Pipeline to Higher Education

The decision most middle class families have to make is not whether their children will go to college, but rather what college their children will attend (Phinney, Dennis & Gutierrez, 2005). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2004), 30 percent of Whites received a bachelor’s degree compared to only 11 percent of Latinos. In most undergraduate research-based institutions, Latino/a representation are less when compared to non research-based institutions (Valverde, 2004). Latino/a students are often first generation college students in their family (Rodriguez, 1996) and do not grow up expecting to attend a college or university (Gardella, Candales & Ricardo-Rivera, 2005). It is necessary to employ educators and key staff that can “maneuver within and construct an educational system that will utilize all available human and material resources to ensure high expectations and academic success for Chicana/o high school migrant students” (Salinas & Reyes, 2004, p. 56). Educational pipelines are critical for migrant students to access higher education. Often these pipelines are facilitated by counselors. With very little guidance available at home to explain the college admissions process, Cranston-Gingras and Anderson (1990) recommend that guidance counselors and school occupational specialists meet with migrant students to review their academic status and develop a realistic post secondary plan. School counselors are well-versed in the financial aid process which is important to helping migrant students make informed decisions that are sensible to their economic situation.

Compared to other ethnic groups, Latinos receive less financial aid to go to college according to an anonymous article, “Latino Students Lag Behind in Financial Aid for College, Report Reveals” (2005). Therefore they require significant financial aid to afford a college education (Castillo & Hill, 2004). According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the total family
income for migrants in 2001-2002 was between $15,000 and $17,499 putting them below the poverty line (Carroll, Samardick, Bernard, Gabbard & Hernandez, 2005). A unique higher education program called the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) makes it possible for freshman migrant students to afford college and provides counseling and remedial assistance to those who need it. CAMP is a competitive federally funded grant that higher education institutions can apply for and is only available at certain college and university campuses. CAMP assists with financial aid, academic counseling, and remedial services when appropriate.

Family Culture

Culture is a defined set of strategies for daily living which one also uses to evaluate the diverse world around them (Swindler, 1986). Familism, or *familismo*, is defined as attitudes, behaviors, and family structures operating within an extended family system and is believed to be the most important factor influencing the lives of Latinos (Coohey, 2001). This family support network provides social, emotional and financial support within *la familia*, or family (Forst & Lehman, 1997; Viramontez Anguiano, 2004). For Latinos, *familia* is not limited to the nuclear group, but includes extended family members and fictive kin as well (Montoya, 1997).

A very common yet important element of the fictive kin family is the *compadre/comadre* network, or *compadrazgo*. “The *compadrazgo* network is created when a couple with a newborn selects another couple as sponsors (godparents) for their infant” (Lopez, 1999, p. 27). This relationship is made official in the church during the baptism of the newborn child. This concept is unfamiliar and sometimes misunderstood by mainstream culture which does not fully comprehend the significance of these relationships within the family structure. Segura and Pierce (1993) argue that mainstream society devalues the collectivist orientation of Latinos who communally emphasize kinship relations like *compadrazgo*. However, Latinos are not alone in
emphasizing the importance of family. Other ethnic groups besides Latinos put a high value on the family structure (Parra-Cardona, Bulock, Imig, Villarruel & Gold, 2006). Studies show that through the interdependent nature of these social networks, Latino families in particular utilize their family structure to access vital services such as transportation to school, financial assistance for school-sponsored activities, and interpreting services for meetings at school (Vega, 1995). According to Forst and Lehman (1997), other factors important to Latino culture include personalism, or *personalismo*, which refers to “the preference Hispanics have for fostering relationships with those who are already a part of their social group; *respeto*, or the importance and need for Hispanics to experience respect in social relationships;… and *machismo*, a construct that suggests that the male figure in the family is the person ‘in charge’ and responsible to ensure that his family unit is protected and adequately provided for” (p. 85).

Parent Involvement

The literature strongly suggests that parent involvement in a child’s educational development in early primary to middle school years plays a crucial role in the educational outcome of all children (Behnke, Piercy & Diversi, 2004; Jasis & Ordóñez-Jasis, 2005; Mehring, 2004). However, teachers put a heavy emphasis on school participation and attendance at meetings to assess parental involvement (Jones & Vales, 1997; Ramirez, 1999). Latino parents are confronted with various barriers, including economic and occupational, that prevent them from visiting the school on a regular basis (Ortiz & Ordonez-Jasis, 2005; Quesada, Díaz & Sánchez, 2003; Valencia & Black, 2002). Thus, the public school system consistently fails to reach out to the Latino community in an effort to properly solicit their participation in the educational process (Olivos, 2004; Ramirez, 2003; Valdez, 1996 as cited in McClelland & Chen, 1997). This is common where school districts have not bridged the cultural gap with their Latino
constituents. “When parents fail to respond to teachers’ attempts at communication, school officials often perceive them as disinterested in their children’s education” (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005, p. 49). Valencia and Black (2002) similarly state that “historically, and contemporarily, there are numerous assertions by individuals in the scholarly literature and in media outlets that Mexican American parents, particularly of low socioeconomic status (SES) background, do not value education” (p. 89). In fact, overwhelming evidence exists in the research showing the importance of parent involvement among Latinos and evidence of its impact on academic achievement (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Valdes, 1996).

It is important to understand that many Latino parents’ educational experience is limited to the schooling they received in their home country where the parent’s role was to support the teachers, not to challenge them (McLaughlin, Liljestrom, Lim, & Myers, 2002). Therefore, parents often feel an extreme sense of intimidation at the thought of being in the presence of their child’s teacher to discuss school related issues (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). Additionally, some parents will often not show up at school if they are not formally invited because an attempt to enter a school building or classroom uninvited for fear that it may be considered intrusive (Ramirez, 2003). Schools must be able to recognize that there are differences in how Latino parents define their role in school and adopt strategies with an inclusive approach to parent involvement (Olivos, 2004; Quezada, Díaz & Sánchez, 2003; Ramirez, 2003). Empathy is also very important because when teachers can empathize with their migrant population, they are better capable of creating a climate that is conducive to a collaborative working relationship between the two entities (Cruz & Patterson, 2005). Furthermore, when parents and teachers come to understand each other and value each other’s contributions, “a parent and teacher advisory
committee could be formed to work with other migrant parents and with the school to improve the education of the migrant student” (Cranston-Gingras & Anderson, 1990, p. 100).

Educación and Consejos

The infrastructure of the migrant Latino identity from a cultural and social context provides a unique perspective including the implementation of educación and consejos in the interface of education. According to Galindo (1996), educación (education) has a broader meaning than in the traditional academic sense implying that the individual (educado/a) is expected to be well mannered and respected by the family and the community as well as having educational success through formal education. In addition, consejos is nurturing advice passed down from parent to child as moral lessons to influence certain behaviors that are consistent with Latino values and interactions (Fránquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004; Valdez, 1996). Consejos are a means through which knowledge is produced, passed on, and negotiated (Villenas & Moreno, 2001). In her article, Delgado-Gaitan (1994) explains that through cultural education mechanisms including consejos, Latinos conceptualize the moral direction of educación. Therefore, their responsibility within this cultural framework is to cultivate in their children proper manners and moral citizenship.

Community Connections

Highly transient populations like migrant farm workers are often at a disadvantage when in need of vital resources in new communities and are unsure where to go or who to turn to. Establishing a strong social network made up of family and friends is beneficial and has a profound impact on an individual’s health and well-being (Cohen & Syme, 1985). Social networks are especially useful during difficult economic conditions (Stack, 1974). The resources gained from the relationships we build and networks we establish within the community are
called social capital (Maggard, 2004). Social capital is made up of the services and relationships we access in communities and schools to sustain a high quality of life (Kozoll, Osborner & García, 2003; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) defines social capital as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p.119). “Students from middle and upper class households, whose parents are college educated, not only have greater access to, but also greater ability to draw from the kinds of social relationships that facilitate academic success than do children raised in less affluent surroundings” (Gibson & Benjínez, 2002). Trust, reciprocity and exchange of services are very important (Putnam, 2000). When a person benefits through the skills or services from another family member, he/she is expected to reciprocate in some way to maintain the family system (Bubolz, 2001). Therefore, this reciprocity is important within immediate family members, extended family, and fictive kin. Familism, or familismo is a form of social capital within Latino families. Familism has been identified as an immediate and extended family support network that provides social, emotional and financial support (Ebaugh 2001; Mirande 1977; Viramontez Anguiano, 2004). Chavez, Wampler, and Burkhart (2006) stress the “importance of studying subgroups within a broader racial or ethnic group to better account for the acquisition of attitudes supportive of social capital formation” (p. 1026).

Acquiring social capital in a community can take time. Thus, social capital is often difficult to acquire for migrant families. Because of their transient lifestyle, social capital, important to a person’s well-being, must be substituted through other means to access the resources necessary for survival. Gibson and Benjínez (2002) found how the migrant students that participated in their study were able to persevere without the same level of social capital as
the White students at the same school through the migrant education program. They maintained that the advocacy and guidance provided by the migrant outreach staff can substitute for the deficiency in their social capital.

Certain community agencies that target specific needs of migrant families institute a one-stop approach to the services they offer. In other words, various agencies may exist within a specific local making it simple for families to apply for all available programs. Locating and accessing these organizations during their initial arrival to a new community becomes routine to some families in need of specific services and understand the effect these agencies can have on the social capital they lack as migrant workers. “Community intervention in schooling can be examined as it takes place through structured partnerships with institutions or community agencies, or through less structured, more organic community involvement, or a combination of both” (Ordonez-Jasis & Jasis, 2004, p. 55). These institutions are strategically found in agricultural regions that have a history of migrant activity. The dedicated people who work in these programs are normally well trained and well equipped to facilitate appropriate support services (Ordonez-Jasis & Jasis, 2004). Like the migrant education programs, these agencies attempt to link families and individuals to the services and resources they need. Furthermore, families are spared the stress of their underdeveloped social capital in communities where they know they will reside just long enough to pick that season’s harvest before it is time to move on to another community in a different state only to repeat the process all over again.

Resiliency

Resiliency is an individual’s positive adaptation to respond to stress and risk situations to overcome challenges (Waller, 2001; Walsh, 2003). The more resilient the individual, the better prepared they are at coping with problems while maintaining a positive attitude towards their
environment (Demos, 1989; Herbert, 1996). As evident in the literature presented in this study, migrant families are exposed to multitudes of risk factors that transform into educational barriers for migrant students throughout their transient educational experience. Yet, somehow many develop the strength and resourcefulness referred to as “resiliency” to confront the adverse conditions of their migratory lifestyle as countless migrant students overcome adversity to succeed educationally. However, how an individual responds to stress as a protective mechanism can vary (Rutter, 1987). Some will struggle endlessly never prevailing over the risk factors that afflict them. Rutter (1987) further argues that this protective mechanism is not always applicable to all adverse situations. Therefore, it is important to analyze and compare how my six participants applied their resiliency to difficult situations.

Summary

An exhaustive review of the literature was conducted in an effort to find sufficient and relevant data on the migrant educational experience from a cultural, familial, and community context. The literature review illustrated three areas where children of migrant workers are most commonly affected by the migratory lifestyle. 1.) School districts across the country are inadequately equipped to meet the academic needs of migrant children. When migrant children appear unexpectedly in the middle of the school year, educators will usually discover just how unprepared they are to handle the education challenges that afflict many of these new arrivals. 2.) Teachers and administrators often lack the cultural competence for building collaborative working relationships with their migrant communities. As a result, migrant students continue to struggle with the cultural and educational discontinuity that exists in school. 3.) School interruptions that are part of the migrant experience have proven to be major impediments to the educational process and the development of social capital.
CHAPTER III. METHODS

This chapter provides a review of the methods used in this life history study. Specifically the following will be presented: research design, participants, role of the researcher, interview protocol, procedures, and data analysis. Each section will be divided throughout the chapter.

Research Design

This study will use a life history research design to explore school, family, and community influences on migrant students for the purpose of understanding educational outcomes. A life history study provides information pertaining to a person’s past lived experiences and retold again by the researcher in a narrative form. Research on the cultural diversity of our learning communities is important for investigating pedagogical practices that better serve the learning styles of all groups (Rovali, Gallien & Wighting, 2005) while qualitative research is conducive to exploring culturally relevant interventions considering that the methodology allows for the development of appropriate theoretical applications (Strickland, 1999). Therefore, it is important to note that my own lived experiences as a child of migrant farm workers not only influenced the guiding research questions for this study, but also the interviewing, data analysis, and data representation/final analysis.

Participants

“Researchers should be more precise when describing their Latino samples. Specific Latino populations examined and geographical region in which the studies were conducted should be reported to allow appropriate generalizations” (Umaña-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002, p. 322-323). Participants included six adult Latinos who have a school-age migratory history in Northwest Ohio. Table 1 presents each participant and his or her migrant stream and highest education level.
Table 1

Participants’ Highest Grade Level Completed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Grade Level Completed</th>
<th>Established Migratory Route</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candelario</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Midwestern Stream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Eastern Stream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hector</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Midwestern Stream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matilde</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Eastern Stream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Midwestern Stream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juanita</td>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Eastern Stream</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The age range of the participants was between 25-35 years old. Two of the participants are high school drop outs who never returned to complete their compulsory education. Two of the participants were high school graduates who did not pursue a post-secondary education. The final two participants completed a minimum of an undergraduate degree from a four-year public or private institution. Criteria for the selection included the following: a) they spent the majority of their school-age experience with their parents following the migrant stream in search of qualifying agricultural work in the U.S., b) they experienced episodes of school interruption during the regular school year because of the transient migrant lifestyle, and c) they participated in migrant education programs wherever possible, and d) they were U.S.-born or became legal residents during their school age years.

Candidates for this study included acquaintances and people who were recommended by professionals in public schools, higher education, and social service agencies familiar with the migrant population. After talking to each candidate in person or by phone to review their past
migratory experiences, individual participants were selected. Once the candidates were selected and they initially agreed to take part in this study, a cover letter was sent to them explaining the purpose of the study and inviting any questions the participants may have regarding the research and the process. A consent form was included with the cover letter which participants needed to complete and return to me officially accepting their role as participant for the study. The form clearly stated that as participants they can voluntarily withdraw from the study at any moment and any information provided during the study will then be removed from the study.

Role of the Researcher

My experience as a child in the migrant stream is my motivation for pursuing this study on family and culture, the K-12 experience, and community resources. Reflecting back on my own life, I realize now that these factors had a strong influence on the choices I made, eventually leading to the level of educational attainment that I have today. I am convinced that all three of these factors were strong and nurturing as I grew up in the migrant stream, developing the resiliency I needed to advance educationally. I wish to study the interconnectedness of these three factors to learn how each influenced the educational paths of other former migrant students during their K-12 experience. If a migrant student never completed high school, does this mean that one or more of the three factors never fully developed ultimately leading to his/her educational shortcoming? Understanding the interconnectedness enhances our understanding of the interventions we as teachers, administrators, parents, and community must consider in an effort to counter the impact of the migrant lifestyle on education. Therefore, I have embarked on a journey to identify how these three factors impact the educational outcomes of migrant children while simultaneously helping me to better understand and appreciate the value of my past migratory experience.
I can recall that my last official day as a migrant farm worker was on August 23, 1990. After having worked a long typical day harvesting cucumbers with my parents, I packed up a few personal items and left for college realizing that I was leaving a type of lifestyle that I had lived from birth. From the moment I left I began wondering why I had been fortunate enough to make it that far while so many of my friends who followed the migrant stream like me had chosen different paths that did not involve education. Garza, Reyes and Trueba (2004) recall from their experiences as migrant students, “we managed to survive in a system that was not designed to meet our basic needs as human beings… the vast majority of our classmates did not make it” (p. 18). In reflecting on my own life history, there were three factors that most impacted my educational outcome which ultimately prepared me for continuing on the higher education track: a) my K-12 experiences, b) my family culture, and c) connections with my community.

Researchers agree that schools in America largely fail to understand the value and importance of a child’s family and cultural realities when differences are evident (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilés, 2005; Olivos, 2004; Quezada, Díaz & Sánchez, 2003; Ramirez, 2003). For example, most researchers agree that parental involvement is vital to the educational success of a child (Behnke, Piercy & Diversi, 2004; Jasis & Ordóñez-Jasis, 2005; Mehring, 2004). However, the role that the parent plays in the educational process is expressed quite differently among Latinos and Whites. My father received a seventh grade education while my mother never made it past the second grade, so they could not help my siblings and me with the subject matter we were expected to do at home. However, my parents made sure they provided all of the school supplies and an area in the home to complete our homework. When we were prepared to move, my father made sure we left on a Friday immediately after school so that we could reach our next destination in time to enroll in our new classes in a new state first thing Monday
morning. It was important to my parents that we not miss a day of school. They were successful in articulating to me the value of an education and staying in school without tutoring us with our homework or attending school functions where parents were encouraged, and sometimes expected, to participate.

The second factor that has a direct impact on the educational outcomes of migrant students is their educational experiences in school. Migrant students in high school constantly worry about their credit hours. Secondary course credits can be easily lost when transferring schools from one state to another because of distinct statutory graduation requirements which can make it difficult to graduate on time. Other students worry more about making new friends and whether they will get on the right bus after school on the first day. “The migration experience is a stressful experience, which affects each family member differently” (Garza, Reyes & Trueba, 2004, p. 12). In certain school districts I attended, migrant students were not openly welcomed by school staff and mainstream students and counselors assigned me to courses that had fewer students instead of the courses crucial to my academic progress; I did not do very well. In contrast, in schools where I felt teachers cared about my progress and expected the best out of me, I excelled significantly. It was this kind of nurturing environment where I discovered my physical talent in track and field which ultimately led to scholarship offers to colleges and universities. However, I did not have the counseling and guidance available in high school to help me navigate through the college enrollment and financial aid process which would have allowed me to make better informed decisions. According to Cranston-Gingras and Anderson (1990) migrant students usually have a misunderstanding of the choices they have beyond high school therefore making poor choices for themselves. Opportunities for personal growth and discovery should abound in the public school setting.
Finally, the third factor impacting outcomes involves the social resources available to migrant families wherever they may move to search for agricultural work. Traveling regularly meant traveling light so clothes were often left behind. A few changes of clothes were all we needed until we arrived to our destination. Thus, second-hand stores and social service agencies that gave out free bags of clothes were valuable resources for our family. When I was a child, my parents enrolled us in any migrant education program available that would keep us in school and away from the dangers of the fields. The only kids who participated in these programs were eligible migrant students like me and the teachers who taught in these programs had a passion for working with this population. They made us feel as though we belonged by valuing our language and our culture and recognizing our capacity to learn like every other American child.

What I bring to the study are two distinct lenses: a) my experiences as a child constantly migrating across the country enduring multiple school interruptions each year due to my family’s migrant lifestyle, and b) as director of the Ohio Migrant Education Center in Fremont, Ohio, which is an agency sub-contracted by the Ohio Department of Education to monitor the Title I, Part C - migrant education programs for the state. My responsibilities include the coordination of migrant education services statewide and to monitoring of the identification and recruitment process as well as migrant student data collection system for the state. This unique job experience keeps me at the social, political and education forefront of migrant issues. Both lenses have given me a thorough understanding of the complex issues facing migrant children today.

Interview Protocol

For this study, data were collected using an interview protocol see Appendix E). The first interview, lasting 30 minutes, consisted of open-ended questions to gain the participants’ trust and to facilitate discussion about their migrant experiences. The basic purpose of this session
was to mentally prepare the participants for the series of interviews to come. The next three
interviews lasted an hour each and focused on a specific topic: K-12 experience in the U.S.,
family and culture, and community connections in that order. A fifth and final meeting was
designated at the end to allow participants the opportunity to reflect on the interview experience.
Location for the interviews varied as it was contingent upon participants’ preference. Each
participant also received a list of questions related to a given topic at least one week in advance
to help evoke memories of specific events in their lives.

Data Analysis

For this qualitative study, I conducted the data collection, organization, and interpretation
concurrently. This simultaneous course was initiated immediately to anticipate any unforeseen
obstacles that could have arose in the interview process and reflected on the relevance of the
research questions and how they were guiding the study. Sufficient time was allotted for analysis
and transcription. As the narrative data got heavier and more concentrated with each interview,
coding was ongoing to identify themes- single, multiple and consensus. I looked for emerging
epiphanies and expanded on certain topics that addressed any developing patterns and meanings
in their stories (Creswell, 1998).

Each participant has his/her own individual chapter in the final report. Themes associated
with K-12 experience, family culture, and community connections were studied separately in that
order. Once all participants were interviewed, themes were aggregated and carefully analyzed
before moving on to another cycle of interviews on a separate topic.

To increase accuracy during data collection, participants received a copy of their
transcripts after each round of interviews for feedback. Any deletions or revisions to the
transcript during member checking gave the document more validity since my participants could
address certain areas in the data analysis that they may have disagreed with before publication and offer their own interpretive conclusion (Atkinson, 1989). This process will assure that researchers are properly representing the lives of their participants in the study (Glesne, 1999).

Peer review was also incorporated at the conclusion of the data collection. Reviewers can look for researcher bias in the study or request clarification on specific analytical findings. The peer review process was carried out by a professional colleague in migrant education selected by me. For enhanced credibility, reflection checks were conducted initially by incorporating the use of a fellow colleague to carry out the proposed interview process directing my own research questions to me. However, this process was only for quality control purposes. The study does not include my own separate chapter.

Procedures

Six adult participants who migrated to Northwest Ohio during their K-12 years were selected for this study. Each participant completed a consent form to verify their interest and contributions to the study. The Human Subject Review Board (HSRB) application from Bowling Green State University will be completed and their approval granted prior to interviewing my six participants and collecting data. Once approval is granted, participants were scheduled for their first round of interviews.

Round one of interviews focused on the topic of K-12 experience which lasted one week. I will take two weeks to transcribe and one week to conduct preliminary analysis. Round two of interviews will focus on the topic of family culture with the same amount of time allotted for transcribing and preliminary analysis. Finally, I repeated the same cycle for round three topic community resources. Each full round was completed prior to the beginning of the next round. Transcription will be done by another individual and participants will be given a copy of their
transcription for feedback. All data gathered was collected and secured in a locked filing cabinet in my home where only I will hold the key. In addition, my participants were assigned a pseudonym in the dissertation and in the data collection process confidentiality purposes.
CHAPTER IV. CANDELARIO

Introduction

Candelario and his family followed the Midwestern Migrant Stream between Texas and Ohio in search of agricultural work. Candelario seemed to enjoy sharing his experiences growing up as a child of migrant workers. Of the six participants for this study, Candelario was the only participant who thanked me for the interview experience claiming that it was therapeutic. At the conclusion of the series of interviews, he confessed that my questions helped him to remember certain moments he had not thought about in some time.

I know you did help me reminisce about the times growing up. Not that I’ve forgotten them, but you don’t sit and think about it all the time. But I certainly got to reminisce about those days.

Candelario graduated from a large public four-year institution in Northwest Ohio majoring in computer science. He currently works for a social service agency that serves migrant families throughout the state. According to Candelario, it is a job that gives him great satisfaction because he feels he is “giving back to his people and to his community.” He hopes to eventually apply his degree towards a career in computer science within the next 5 to 10 years.

K-12 Experience

The most challenging experience for Candelario and his siblings was the racial discrimination they encountered in the public school system each time they made a migratory move. The ability to make new friends was not the issue, but rather the acceptance and tolerance of their migrant identity by teachers and fellow classmates. Candelario illustrates this point as follows and asserts that these were the worst moments of his K-12 experience:
We always saw moving around as something hard growing up because it was my older sister, my other sister, and there was me. It was always like, ok, we are going to move to a different school… how are they going to treat us? That was always our first concern you know…. This was back in maybe the ‘80s, somewhere around there. I think as Hispanics we were still looked down on. So, here we are, we’re going to move to a new school district, what is the school going to be like this time, you know. We already knew the areas we were going to be working at, like Lindsey and sometimes over in the Cleveland area doing strawberries, apples, and stuff like that. It [work] was all a different experience every time we moved. But we were familiar with the schools already, so that really didn’t bother us. It was always, “How are they going to treat us?” That was a big concern for us. But it was interesting. There were times that we didn’t feel like going, not because the school was bad, but the way they were going to treat us growing up.

The lack of educational continuity between both states was also of great concern. Candelario believes there was an obvious difference explaining that Ohio offered a more comprehensive educational experience than in his home school in South Texas.

I think here in Ohio they were more education driven then they were down in Texas.

Down in the Valley [South Texas] everyone was Hispanic and stuff, but I always saw that here in Ohio they always motivated you more. The material that we learned here in Ohio versus what we learned in Texas was very different… I think that maybe the delivery of the instruction was very different too. I always saw the Texas teachers more laid back.

“This is what you guys have to do, do it”. Up here [Ohio] it was more like “Do this. If you guys need more extra credit, if you need more help, we’re going to help you on this”. It was very different. That’s what I saw.
Candelario stated that his families returned to the same general area each season for agricultural work. “We always stuck to the same farmers, same camps, so we rarely went to a new school district.” Regardless of which school Candelario attended, he was driven by the challenge to learn and the challenge to fit into the school culture. He was able to constantly assess his situation and his surroundings to remind himself that he was no different than those students in the classroom with him who were academically inclined. His ability to reflect and analyze in this way coupled by his parents’ constant words of encouragement to persist were crucial to his success in school. Candelario coincidentally considers this his fondest memories of school.

I think one of the best moments was really going in there and trying to learn, because my parents always advised us, you know “You guys better get an education”. Education was something they were always after us about since we started working in the fields. The best memories were really trying to learn. Because we would see other kids learning and it was like, “I can do the same thing you’re doing”, you know. My parents were like the same parents they have. The only difference was that my parents were migrant workers, and I’m a migrant worker, and they’re not. It was always trying to learn, trying to meet people, trying to get acquainted with those kids that really liked you [laugh] and trying to understand them and stuff like that. I think those would be some of my fondest memories… trying to fit in [laugh].

When asked to describe his favorite teacher and what it was about this person that made him/her special, Candelario named a particular high school teacher in Texas. What Candelario admired most about this Algebra teacher was that he would go out of his way to help all of his students and gave every student adequate opportunity to succeed.
One I always remember is my Algebra teacher in high school in Texas. He was always willing to help anybody that wasn’t passing his class. There were times when I was taking exams and he was like, “You know what, if you want to stay after class, I’ll help you, I’ll teach you how to do this”. I saw the dedication he had for not only myself, but for the other students in the class. I’m not too fond of the educational system in Texas. They would always push any Hispanic into like your auto mechanics, your cooking class, and stuff like that. I kind of felt that it [scheduling procedures] was more towards the migrant kids sometimes because they would always put us in a class to do your homework and try to catch up on your work and stuff. I can’t remember his name but he was really good. He is the one who has always impacted me. Any time I was struggling with something in school, I would think back to him and his dedication and the time he took to really motivate us pass the exams and stuff.

On the other hand, Candelario believed that his teachers in Ohio were more concerned about his academic progress than the teachers in Texas. He claimed that “it was more the Caucasian teachers that really went out of their way to help you more.”

When asked to list his least favorite teachers, Candelario struggled to provide a response. He finally acknowledged that he did not have any teacher he did not value from his K-12 experience.

I don’t think I would say that I had a least favorite teacher. I guess I always just saw them as teachers. If they want to put the effort in it, they’re going to put it. So, I don’t think I would have a least favorite teacher.
In describing the effectiveness of the communication that the school had with his parents, Candelario stated that it was practically nonexistent. He did not feel that the school ever made an honest attempt to include his parents into the school experience.

As far back as I can remember I never saw the school communication with my parents. I think it was more my parents with the school versus the school with my parents. My mom and dad were always like, “How are you doing in school, are your grades good”. They always saw my report card. Since my mom’s English wasn’t that good, we would always translate for her. The communication wasn’t that good.

Schools disseminated letters and other materials in English with little consideration for the language spoken by migrant families in the home. Therefore, Candelario and his siblings translated the school forms and documents for their parents. However, he does not entirely blame the school. He feels if his parents could learn English that it would reduce the communication problems although he does not blame his parents either. “I think if my mom or my dad were more involved with their English, maybe the communication would have been a little bit better. So, I don’t know if any side has the blame.”

Candelario’s contact with his guidance counselors was minimal. He is convinced that they had no impact on his educational outcome in high school. His interaction with guidance counselors was limited to scheduling matters at the time of enrollment into a new school.

Guidance counselors, uh, the only time I would see them was when we were registering [laughs]…. Other than that, I didn’t get any encouragement from my guidance counselors, you know, point you in the right direction like some of the other kids. I don’t know if it was because we were migrants…. As far as the impact [laughs] I don’t think they had much of an impact. Like I said, it was only going in, registering, you saw you
guidance counselor and that was it. They prepare your schedule for the whole time you’re going to be here. Once you leave the transcripts and all that gets sent. And that was it. Even without the assistance of guidance counselors, Candelario attended college right out of high school. Additionally, he never spoke with a college admissions counselor before attending college. He attributes his interest in higher education and ultimately his applying to college to his older sister who at the time was attending Bowling Green State University. Candelario added:

I think it was more through my sister that we all pursued the college education and the guidance from my parents saying you know, “You guys have to go to school, graduate from high school, and then keep on going to college.” Guidance counselors at least for us didn’t play a big role.

Getting to college was no easy task for Candelario. Although his grades were rarely an issue, he struggled in high school to accumulate enough credits to graduate. According to Candelario, this was a direct result of the constant school interruptions from their migratory journeys.

I think one of the biggest things we looked at, and I know a lot of the migrant kids face it today, was like losing your credit hours every time you transferred from school to school. It was always hard for us because we were always trying to finish when we were in school in Ohio, trying to get our credits from Texas was difficult because sometimes they wouldn’t take them. So then we had to repeat everything again. I saw it as a challenge because we worked our butts off when we were here and we went back to Texas and we had to redo everything again. Moving from state to state, I think this was the biggest one. Trying to achieve what we wanted, because these were two different states, the credits never really clashed so we had to redo some courses again.
I concluded this interview session by asking Candelario what he saw as a negative outcome from his experience as a child of migrant workers. He gave the question some thought before finally providing an answer. At a very young age, it is evident that Candelario was considerably bothered by the sight of watching his parents laboring in the fields and not being able to assist because he was too young to legally work.

One of the things I did see the most was my parents really struggling to support us sometimes. We were young kids growing up and I remember telling my parents, “I want to go out and pick pickles with you and help you guys”, but they wouldn’t let me do it. They had all these regulations and all that.

Family Culture

Candelario comes from a family of six children. He is the third to the oldest and comically refers to his family as the Mexican Brady Bunch because there are exactly three boys and three girls total. Candelario also mentioned an additional member of the family. His cousin from Mexico was adopted at a young age by Candelario’s parents. Candelario and his siblings naturally accepted him as a brother.

Like most migrant parents, Candelario’s mother and father did not advance very far in school. Their formal education was limited to the third grade in Mexico. Candelario’s parents did not advance any higher educationally because of their financial responsibilities to family. At a young age, they were expected to work adult-like schedules and provide for their families.

In Mexico, my mom being the oldest, traditionally it is the responsibility of the eldest to work. So, she wasn’t fortunate enough to get an education. Same thing with my dad; he had to help out to feed the family.
A common theme that emerges from Candelario’s story is his passion for his immediate and extended family. His fondest memories of living at home occurred when the family returned home to Texas after a long harvest season when there was time to spend with family and friends.

Some of the best memories when we would finally migrate back to Texas, we were able to do stuff as a family. In Ohio, we were too busy working or going to school. But basically it was the family unity that we had once we got to Texas.

Candelario is able to further validate the importance of family unity through traditions that were unique to him which could only be experienced when they returned to Texas. An example of this was

Spending Thanksgiving at my tia’s [aunt’s] house and eating turkey. My mom wasn’t very familiar with cooking a traditional Thanksgiving meal. Mom knew how to make tamales and other great dishes typical to our culture, but as far as turkey we would go to my tia’s house for that. And then on Christmas we would go to church and everyone would gather at my tia’s house again to eat. Unfortunately in Ohio, we didn’t get to experience that.

The strong family unity was never more apparent then what they experienced when Candelario’s grandfather died in Mexico. Luckily this happened when Candelario’s family was already in Texas, but recalls having to stay behind with his brothers and sisters while his parents drove to Mexico for funeral arrangements.

Candelario believes that although his parents were not able to get very far in school, they understood the value of an education and encouraged their children to take advantage of the opportunities they were not afforded at their age.
My parents were always gung-ho about keeping us in education. It was something that my parents saw as something that was going to be good for us. It was something that would help us prosper. So they were always very positive about us finishing school. They would always ask for our report card even though my parents education wasn’t high, we were always truthful at explaining our report cards so that they would understand how we were doing. My oldest sister would also see our report card. And when our grades were low, it was definitely a concern to my parents.

Candelario’s parents did not take their children’s education for granted. They played an active role by reading to them in Spanish at a very young age. He recalls his father reading to them from a newspaper written in Spanish. His mother’s contribution to their educational experience was transporting them to public libraries to access books. However, as much support as was demonstrated at home, they rarely attended school functions or made an effort to communicate with their teachers unless their children were at risk of failing.

I don’t know if it was because they weren’t bilingual. But even in Texas they didn’t attend school functions. My mom would sometimes try to get a hold of my teachers when my grades were bad. But she wasn’t always successful in trying to meet the teachers.

Still, the support continued at home. Sacrifices were made for the sake of their children’s education. Even though at work there was a quota the family was expected to meet before the end of the day, Candelario asserts that he and his siblings were released to go home early if they had to study for a test or to complete school their assignments. Somehow his parents managed to complete their quota on their own. Moreover, the children were not permitted to miss school for extended periods of time. As soon as they arrived to their migratory destination, they were usually enrolled in the new school promptly.
Any time we arrived to Texas or Ohio, we had to be in school [laughs]. We always had to be put in school right away. There were times when we weren’t in school for a couple of days, but it was usually as soon as we arrived.

Community Connections

When arriving to their migratory location, Candelario’s family made it a point to familiarize themselves with the social service agencies in the area. Federal assistance in the form of food stamps was always a common resource they would try to access but were sometimes turned down.

As far as resources, you know, it was always the store. Where are you going to get your food? Ah, in the event that we did not have much money, we did get food stamps and stuff like that. These programs were always hard to qualify for. They always looked at what you had; cars, trucks. They would often say “no, you guys don’t need the money.” But maybe it would be the stores and knowing where the doctor was or the hospital was in case someone got sick and stuff like that. These were some of the services and resources we thought were essential when we were always migrating.

He adds that if they encountered a newly arrived migrant family who was unfamiliar with the community, they always went out of their way to show them where to go for the resources they needed. He feels that assisting families was part of their responsibility of keeping the migrant network active.

If there was a family that was in need of services that was brand new and they didn’t know the community too well, this [referral system] was important. Or if it was their first time coming here, we would always try to take them to the store, or try to take them to get their federal assistance, always trying to show them where the store was at and stuff.
So, it was always trying to help out the families that were coming up here like my parents had the help when they were first coming up here.

Clearly, the crew leader in the camp was a crucial part of this network in the migrant camps. In Candelario’s experience in the migrant camps, he considered crew leaders as valuable resources. As he saw it, they had a responsibility to their workers in making sure that their basic needs were being met while under their management.

Most of the camps we went to, we knew the crew leader, so we did see that they were always helpful and resourceful for the other people who were new. He was always trying to point people in the right direction as far as where they can go for groceries or “this is where you can go for your health care.” They did play a crucial role, but they started fading there towards the end at least where we were at.

With the presence of crew leaders, farmers rarely get involved with the social needs of their workers. Candelario feels fortunate that the farmers his family worked for took a vested interest in their circumstances. In Candelario’s migrant experience, the farmer played a key role in the support network within the migrant community.

The farmers that we had, uh, we were very fortunate that they helped out our families. It was like, if you guys work these many weeks, you’re going to get unemployment, “I’m paying for it”, the farmer would say. So he was always trying to help us out. We had been working for the farmer for a while, so he was always trying to help us out, you know. As far as the resources: same thing. If the crew leader wasn’t helping us, the farmer was. “You guys need anything, you need a form signed, just let me know”. It was always positive with farmers.
These relationships that were part of the support network for Candelario and his family were possible because they continually returned to the same farms to work. Even though they could have tried their luck in Florida, they stuck with the same migratory route which helped maintain their social capital. Candelario who has been away from working in the fields and living in the camps fears that these networks are not as common in migrant communities anymore.

Candelario and his family did move to a community in a state they had never visited before. He recalls the brief experience of helplessness because they were without the established network they were used to in the communities they frequently stayed.

We did go to Wyoming once. We went from Texas to Wyoming and then to Ohio. It was just us and a family that had gone there the previous year in the pickles, so trying to find the resources was a little bit different. Just the journey from Texas all the way to Wyoming was a big one. We went through Denver, Colorado. I remember somewhere in mid Wyoming we went to do sugar beets. I think that was the only time when it was totally different. We had to find resources for ourselves and stuff like that.

Candelario and his family quickly learned that accessing resources was easier when they returned to communities that were familiar to them. The social networks they established became important. The relationships in the migrant communities were exceptionally strong and dependant on the skills of one another.

I think it [communal relationship] was key because if your car broke down, there was always someone who would take you to the store if you needed the help. These were friendships where you could depend on the other families to help you out in your time of need.
When asked about his thoughts regarding the migrant condition now, Candelario believes that the migrant lifestyle as he remembers it is no longer the same. He believes that migrant farmworkers are worse off today than when he migrated with his family.

It seems that the housing situation has gotten a little bit worse. We are seeing more slavery-like conditions than there used to be back then. Who knows if it’s ever going to improve? It might get worse than it already is, but that remains to be seen.

Resonance

Candelario has no regrets about the hard life he lived as a child. Although he admits that there were limitations to personal freedoms he did not have as a result of the migrant lifestyle, he would not want to change anything about his past. It was also clear to me that he admired his siblings and their academic accomplishments. I asked him if he wouldn’t mind to summarize for me where his siblings were currently in their educational and career ventures.

Well, my oldest sister graduated from Bowling Green State University and she is a computer operator for the university. My other sister is finishing up her nursing degree from Owens Community College and she will be done in a couple of months. Then it’s my brother who last year just completed his criminal justice degree from Bowling Green. He is currently working at the county jail as an officer. He will soon be going into the border patrol. Then my sister did take courses in word processing in Houston. She’s not doing anything right now, but she did finish her high school education and moved on. And my youngest brother is a freshman in high school and he is in honors classes. He has been in honors classes the past 3 years. He has aspirations of becoming a lawyer. My cousin, who we adopted, is finishing up his accounting [degree]. But he is struggling because like I said he came from Mexico and has struggled a bit with his English.
The following statement Candelario made during our final session together best captures the essence of his life story as a child of migrant workers.

I think I gained a lot of things that really show the family ties that a family can have. We always worked together to accomplish your *cincuenta surcos de pepino* [50 rows of pickles] or your three hundred that we sometimes had. It was always a positive experience. Yeah, there were times when you were like, “Hey, why am I a migrant” or “Why couldn’t it have been Joe Schmo from down the road”? Our family was always there supporting us in everything we did. There is so much that somebody learned from being a migrant, you know. I would never take that back because I’ve learned so much. And a lot of people don’t see it because you have to be on time for work, you have to make sure you do your stuff good, it’s things that you grasp when you are out in the *lavor* [field]. You have to finish your *cuatrocientos surcos* [50 rows] by noon or else it’s going to be hot and you’re not going to be able to do nothing. So it was a very positive experience. Uh, as far as the negative, I didn’t see too much. My mom and dad were always there with us. It was that comfort we had with them helping us out and stuff like that.
CHAPTER V. SANDRA

Introduction

Sandra attended a private university in Northwest Ohio where she earned an undergraduate degree in Spanish K-12 with an endorsement in Bilingual Education. Although she taught Spanish for two years at an area high school and enjoyed the experience, she struggled with making enough time to spend with her two children. The time commitment outside of school that is required of the profession (grading and preparation work) took a toll on her and on her children. Sandra recalls the sad moment she considers was the breaking point and the impetus to her seeking a different career choice:

One Saturday I was sitting on my bed with test papers spread out all over the place. The boys had their breakfast earlier that morning and had been sitting quietly in front of the television. I told them that if they let mommy work on her “Hola” stuff, I would take them to the park as soon as mommy was done. I hardly noticed that they were even in the house. By the time I finished grading it was already past noon. The entire morning had just slipped away. Without hesitation I started planning my lessons for the following week. In my mind I was convinced that I wouldn’t be finished on time to take them to the park. (she pauses for a moment…) Sometime later, my daughter finally came into the room with this very sad puppy dog face and said, “Come on mommy, no more Hola Books”. I began crying hysterically. (she pauses again…) I had literally bribed them to stay quiet so that I could get done what I needed to get done for school. That’s when I knew I had to do something different for a living.
Sandra now works for the federal government earning substantially more than she would be as an educator. Sandra admits that not only does she enjoy the time she is able to spend with her family, but she also enjoys her work as a federal employee.

Sandra was born in Mexico and lived in the same town until her stepfather brought her and her mother to the U.S. when Sandra was only 9 years old. They moved to Dade City, Florida where she started the fourth grade and was thrust into a migrant lifestyle almost immediately. Sandra and her family followed the Eastern Migrant Stream harvesting oranges in Florida then migrating to Ohio to harvest cucumbers and bell peppers.

K-12 Experience

Sandra and her family rarely ventured to new areas of the country for migratory work. Her parents preferred to migrate to the same cities and towns they traveled to each year. When Sandra moved from one school district to another, even though she was familiar with the people and the environment, she found the academic adjustments somewhat demanding and not always a pleasant experience. Having to readjust to new settings was difficult. Fun at times, but most of the time difficult. I always believed that the Ohio schools were, uh, a bit more challenging. I felt they prepared me a little bit better than the school in Florida where I attended. It always seemed like we were ahead in the curriculum here in Ohio and when I went back to Florida, I was jumping into content things that we had already covered in Ohio. We would always start the school year here in Ohio and finish it in Florida.

When asked to share her best memories of school, Sandra’s response was “friends”. Academic issues aside, the social aspect of the K-12 experience was what Sandra found the most exciting. While some students may find it difficult to deal with the loss of old friends and find it
stressful to make new acquaintances, Sandra seemed to embrace the prospect of forming new relationships and rekindling old ones at the end of a migratory cycle.

I most enjoyed going back to the friends I had left behind. I had my friends here in Ohio and I would leave them behind, so I was always sad to leave them. But I was always looking forward to seeing my friends from Florida who were already waiting for me, I guess.

On the flip side of that issue, when asked to share her worst moments in school, Sandra’s spoke about her negative relationships with peers when she reached high school.

I would say that the worst moment I had was in the tenth grade where I was adjusting because I had lost a lot of my older friends who had graduated that year. And, uh, when I came back to the Florida schools which I considered my permanent home, my friends were gone and I had to adjust to new kids I guess. That was the worst moment. I thought that I really, seriously wanted to drop out.

On the subject of teachers, Sandra seemed to have a quantity of nurturing educators whom she feels were genuinely concerned for her progress in school. When asked to describe her favorite teacher, Sandra delightedly offered a couple of names. Afterwards, Sandra explained that all of her favorite teachers shared at least one similar trait.

They were strict. They demanded a lot from me for good reason. I guess they saw, uh, that I had potential. I didn’t see it myself, but they did. So, they pushed me and I really appreciated that.

Curious to learn more about these highly regarded teachers, I asked Sandra about their ethnic background. Surprisingly, none of the teachers she mentioned were of Latino background.
They were all but Latinos. Uh, Mr. Johnson was Caucasian, Ms. Clark was my math teacher, Ms. Lynn from the fourth grade was African American. And uh, no, I didn’t have any Latino teachers. I did have a Latina guidance counselor through the migrant education program in Florida who guided us and prepared us for the college experience. But she was not my teacher. And there was also a Latina aide in the fourth grade when I was in a pull out program who would give an hour of instruction in English. She was Latina and she was demanding, but she was not a teacher. She was considered an aide.

When asked to list teachers she least liked, Sandra surprisingly struggled to think of at least one teacher. She took a long pause to think and finally responded, “I didn’t have any”. Even though she did not have a least favorite teacher, she strongly felt that the sarcasm by some teachers was demeaning to students and not conducive to a positive classroom environment. Sandra recalls one particular interaction with a teacher:

In the sixth grade and things [English comprehension] were still not very clear to me. And what she said sounded like she was being nice. But after I learned the meaning of what she was saying and I learned her tone, I learned she was not a very nice person. She would remind me of how awful I did on a certain test. She wasn’t pushy; she was just pretty much telling me that I was doing bad… that I was bad and that I was just doing bad.

On the topic of schools’ methods for communicating with her parents, Sandra served as the interpreter. Even though her father conversed in English fluently, he could not read or write in any language. Sandra remembers schools always sending letters and other relevant information home in English. Her mother went to school in Mexico and learned to read well.
Sandra asserts that her mother would have been able to read these materials had the school sent them home written in Spanish.

Sandra does not recall any of her teachers introducing the idea of going to college to her. Instead, Sandra credits her high school completion and her ultimately attending college to her guidance counselor in Florida.

When I returned to Florida [in the middle of the school year], Mr. Miller was the one who said “it looks like you did well in your classes up north, I think you can handle something challenging down here.” So there is where it started in the ninth grade. He was my counselor all the way through my senior year even though he wasn’t supposed to be. So he guided me through high school and helped me select the classes that I needed to keep going.

Her guidance counselor, Mr. Miller, organized a field trip to Florida State University to inspire Sandra and other migrant students like her to see college as a practical option after high school. Sandra’s migrant counselor, Ms. Posas, also helped organize this trip to area colleges, “She was the one who assisted the migrant kids to, I guess, prepare them for life after high school. They took us on field trips to colleges so that we would know what to expect when we enrolled.”

Sandra was presented another opportunity to speak to college admissions counselors through the summer migrant education programs in Ohio.

I was either a junior or a senior, I was attending the migrant school programs in the evening here in Ohio to earn high school credit and we had like a college fair where they had counselors from the University of Toledo, The University of Findlay, and Bowling Green State University. They came to talk to the students about college and the university experience and I had an opportunity to talk to a counselor and gather some good
information. I already knew about The University of Findlay because I had relatives that went to school there. I knew there was an option to go there too, but I didn’t get information from there because I wasn’t yet sure where I was going to go or what I was going to do.

Curious about the impact that relatives who previously attended college had on Sandra’s decision to go to college, I asked about the extent of their influence in her attending The University of Findlay.

It was pretty much a decision I made on my own. The information they [relatives] were sharing with me was more related to the cost of the school. It was a private school, it was expensive, and there was an idea that because you were a migrant you could go to school for free and come to find out that was not the case. So they wanted to make sure that I was aware of that.

Sandra’s experience with her high school guidance counselors in Ohio was quite different. However, her experience with her guidance counselors in Ohio was quite different. When asked about the impact that her Ohio guidance counselors had on her success in school, Sandra responded

In Ohio, not very much. Other than helping me select my classes, but I always felt that they wanted me to go with the general classes…. They didn’t feel that I needed to be in the college-prep classes.

For Sandra, her biggest challenge came in high school as she struggled to meet the strict graduation requirements from two different states. The only logical way for her to stay on track was to earn secondary credit hours through summer migrant education programs for migrant students.
I had to go to that migrant school program at night only because I was short of credit hours. Because of the moves, I lost a credit or two, and so just to make sure I had enough, I was attending school for that reason. I wasn’t even supposed to be going to that school because I’m a girl and girls don’t go out at night to night school programs [laughs]. But I was able to finish in four years because of the extra credit that I took in the migrant night school. One of the classes helped me with the credits and the other helped to replace a course I failed allowing me to raise my GPA.

Migrant education programs had been accessible to Sandra during most of Sandra’s K-12 experiences. She found them particularly helpful when she first learned to speak English, but she recalls instances when these programs where not offered.

I attended regular school without migrant education programs. They didn’t have services for migrant students. There were at least three or four schools that I attended in Ohio that did not have services for migrant students. I myself did fine. Uh, I needed help back when I was in the forth and fifth grade because I was just learning the language. But once I learned the language I did pretty good.

Family Culture

Sandra is the oldest of six children. All of her siblings are half brothers and sisters and have all graduated from high school except the youngest who is still a sophomore. Sandra’s mother completed the forth grade in Mexico and her stepfather completed the third grade in the U.S.

Sandra’s fondest memories of living at home consisted of her mother and spending quality time with her at home. They had a strong bond because the fact that Sandra was the only child in the family from a previous marriage. Sandra felt that this made her unique and cherished
every personal moment alone with her mother. What makes Sandra different from the rest of the participants was that she was the only one with a stepfather and admits to having an ailing relationship with him. When asked about any family rituals or traditions that her family shared, she replied that they had none. She claimed that they lived their lives “one day at a time”. Sandra blames her stepfather’s controlling nature and inability to express emotion or love towards family members. Sandra gives an example of one of those experiences she feels she was denied.

The grower and the crew leader did have that end of the season party where they killed a pig and invited the camp to attend. The cookout was done there in the camp. But as I mentioned before, my stepfather did not care for his family to be involved in those types of activities. So, my family did not attend.

Sandra began working in the fields at age ten. Although she recalls attending a migrant education program during one particular summer, the program was only an option during the weekdays. Her mother was forced to take the children to the fields with her on weekends since there were no alternative child care services. Although she was not expected to contribute to the family income, she would help by picking a few rows of cucumbers in what was her mother’s section of field. Sandra learned that the more rows she picked, the sooner they went home. At around age 12, Sandra was initiated into adulthood by being assigned her own number of cucumber rows.

When I started working for wages… I believe I was about 12 or 13. I actually had a responsibility… we had certain number of rows of pickles during the summer that I was assigned to and my mother her number of rows that she was assigned to. So, together we had to pick that section each day.
Although Sandra’s earnings were a significant contribution to the family’s income at a very young age, Sandra believes that her parents still made education a priority.

They knew it was important. They pushed, they encouraged us to keep going, they first focused on high school. They would tell me, make sure you graduate. They themselves did not have the education; they did not know what it was like. They had no clue on how to help me with my homework. But they knew it was important, so I had to do it.

For Sandra’s parents, participating in summer educational services through the migrant education programs was not as important as attending the regular school year. This, working and contributing to the family’s income was considered a higher priority.

Well, during the summer, when I was actually working for wages, ah, school was not an issue, unless I was attending the night summer school program here in Ohio, and I think I only attended that for one or two summers. But I worked during the day and went to school during the night. So, during the summer, school was not a priority, work was the priority. During the school year, my parents made it very clear that school was first and work was second. So, I would go to school Monday thru Friday and Saturday and Sunday I would be out in the fields helping my Mom.

Although Sandra’s parents could not academically assistance her with school related assignments, Sandra believes that her mother provided enough encouragement and moral support to allow her to persevere through high school.

My mother would ask how I was doing, if it was something I could handle. There was no way she could help me. I would try to explain it to her several times but she did not have a clue, but she knew that as long as I was not struggling that I was doing okay. As long as
I was not worried about the assignment, that I was okay. She just kept encouraging me to keep going.

Although the course context in high school was too complicated for Sandra’s parents to assist with homework, her experience in the earlier grades was somewhat different. The challenges of learning English as a second language was something Sandra and her mother experienced together during their first year or two in the U.S. For that brief moment, her mother played an active role in Sandra’s educational experience.

My mother actually with a little bit of English that she picked up, she helped me to transition when I was in the beginning of the first fourth grade year where I was just learning the language. She broke down the sound of the English letters so that I could practice.

Sandra’s young developing mind absorbed the new language very efficiently and soon surpassed her mother’s comprehension of English. Soon, her mother fell behind linguistically while Sandra flourished in her second language. Early reading was not considered important in the home, but what little reading that did take place made a big difference to Sandra. “My mother never really sat down and read a story to me, except for the Bible and a few other books in Spanish. I believe that it was that brief experience that helped me to read in Spanish.”

Sandra’s parents’ participation in school activities and attendance at meetings was limited. They seemed unsure of what their role was in relation to the mainstream school culture. However, that role was in time defined through her school experiences and those of her younger siblings and by settling out in Florida after Sandra left the migrant stream to go to college.

They did attend school functions for my younger brothers and sisters later on but not for me. I think they were more informed and I also think that the place where they settled out
in Dade City, Florida was a little bit more, uh, I think the parents were a little bit more involved. There were Spanish Speaking parents and so they were comfortable with the community, and they were able to feel like they were a part of it I guess. But while I was growing up we did not have any of that. When I reached junior high and high school, they felt that they didn’t need to attend school functions…. I was doing fine.

The only time Sandra’s parents visited her school was to discuss her fate with her teacher at the end of her fourth grade year. Her teacher felt that even though Sandra had excelled in math and other areas, her language skills in English were not adequate for the fifth grade. Recognizing the significance of this meeting, Sandra remembers her mother looking to her social network to solicit the assistance of her “comadres” for interpreting needs.

My mother would look for a lady in the camp that she most trusted who could spoke English. She would tell me, “I think I’m going to ask my comadre Manuelita to take me, she owes me a favor.” And that was how she would find someone to translate for her in school. Once I got older I did all the translating for her.

At the end, however, concurring with the teacher’s recommendation, Sandra was held back in the forth grade.

Community Connections

In Florida, the one area they always returned to each winter was Dade City. This is where Sandra treasured most of her peer relationship and where her friendships were long term. Her migration north to Ohio was a slightly different story. The migratory pattern they followed over the year within that state exposed her to various communities and school districts.

We mostly moved from Dade City, Florida to Bowling Green [Bloomdale, Ohio]. We moved to Florida from Texas when we first arrived in the United States. My stepfather
had worked for the same grower since he was a child in Bloomdale, Ohio, so in the
summer he would bring the family to Ohio to work in the pickles. We also went to Old
Fort, Ohio. That was for work in the sugar beets. My stepdad was the only one that
worked during that time. We also went to Arcadia, Ohio. We worked in Wood County
but we lived in Hancock County.

One very unique experience Sandra encountered in Ohio was living on North Bass Island on
Lake Erie where her family and close relatives harvested grapes. The island is located less than
an hour north from where they harvested cucumbers each summer and was part of the family’s
migratory journey to Ohio. Sandra recalls her experiences living on the island after a long season
of picking cucumbers.

We did go to other communities like North Bass Island—an actual island in Lake Erie. My
parents had found work in the grapes. My grandfather was the crew leader in that camp,
so that is how we ended up there. We could only purchase groceries in two week cycles
because the company my parents worked for only took the boat out to town every two
weeks. The kids on the island walked to school about a mile away from the camp. No
school buses.

According to Sandra, federal assistance was a valuable resource to the family. The size of
her family made it necessary for them to apply for these resources which were merely a
supplement especially when work had not yet started. However, the task of physically driving to
the office and applying for federal assistance was left to her mother.

My stepfather did not like to contact the agencies, did not want to deal with the
paperwork, and did not want to give proof of income. He did not want to keep track of
this or that. But the Job and Family Services, then called the Department of Human
Services, we always went for the food stamps… if we qualified. We only needed them for a month or two. And the AFDC check, now called the Needy Family grant, I believe. We would also go to the food pantries and we would walk out with a box of food and clothing. These visits were done my mother. She took me and my little brothers and sisters. My stepfather would never go with us.

As Sandra matured and became more proficient in English, she began interpreting for her mother during doctors’ visits and trips to various social service agencies. Sandra’s face gleamed at the memory of her mother calling Sandra her little “secretaria” [secretary].

As Sandra’s mother became more familiar with the American system, migrant family issues, human rights issues, and discrimination, the more involved she became in the migrant camps. The organic intelligence she exhibited, fueled by her passion for her family and community, contributed to activist nature.

When my mother was able to drive, she would also provide some of the women with a ride to the clinic, grocery store and other places. We would pass on the information about the clinic, especially if they had little kids. She would tell them about enrolling the kids in school during the summer. She was an advocate for the women in the camp, and their source of strength and motivation to do what was right for themselves and for their children. Her advocating ways got her in trouble with my dad a lot.

Although Sandra’s stepfather never participated in the application process for federal assistance, there was a different type of community resource that was valuable to him. When asked if it was important to have friends and family members in the communities they migrated to, Sandra believed that this social network was the deciding factor as to where they would make their next agricultural move. She felt that their social network was important because
They were our connection to the work we did. And as long as they were there, then our family was there. When my grandfather stopped being the Crew Leader, we were not sure if we were going to stay, but my stepfather made the decision that he had a job and since he worked in the packing factory, he drove the tractor and forklift, my mom and siblings worked out in the fields. So, he felt he had a secure position for the summer and so that is why we ended up returning to the same farm. The rest of the relatives moved away to do something else.

Religion played an important role for Sandra and her family. Although they had always considered themselves non-practicing Catholics, one particular visit from a group of Jehovah’s Witnesses to their camp influenced them to convert. Their participation in Jehovah’s Witness only lasted a short time. They visited the Pentecostal church and found its beliefs to be more aligned to their personal beliefs. Their faith, while it had evolved into an essential part of their life, came towards the end of their migratory experience. By that time, the family had started settling out in Florida and Sandra was on her way to college and establishing a new identity for herself with little influence from her parents.

Resonance

In listening to Sandra, it was clearly obvious that her mother played an important role in her life growing up in the migrant stream. Although she was not able to provide Sandra the educational support she needed at home, her mother became Sandra’s role model and inspiration. Sandra credits her for the strong and educated person she is today. Her death in 1997 after a long bought with cancer brought Sandra great sorrow and pain. With time and support from her husband and family, Sandra was able to come to terms with her loss and has continued to cherish her memories of her mother. Soon she found herself advocating in her community like her
mother had done in hers. Here, Sandra poignantly shares a very personal story about her mother which perfectly exemplifies the legacy she left behind.

I got the call on a Wednesday night that my mother had suddenly passed away at Tampa Hospital. I couldn’t believe it, and I still find it hard to believe it today. On Monday of that week I had just talked to her. You know what she had been doing that day… taking women she knew to the health clinic to get a breast exam. At her wake they played a video tape of my mom taken during a talk show taped in Tampa of my mom educating women about the importance of getting periodic physical doctors exams to promote better health and longer living.

Sandra currently volunteers her interpreting skills at a near by hospital and has assisted migrant families within the community by taking them to their INS appointments in Cleveland.
CHAPTER VI. HECTOR

Introduction

Hector’s mother completed a third grade education in Mexico while his father completed his third grade education in the U.S. Hector is the second oldest in a family of 8 children and high school his highest level of education completed. The family followed the Midwestern Migrant Stream from Harlingen, Texas, to Bowling Green, Ohio. The difference I see in Hector that is unique from the other participants in this study is that their father owned a semi truck that he took on their migratory journeys. The places they traveled to for agricultural work was highly dependant on the farms where his father was permitted to use his truck for hauling. At the end of the day when the cucumbers or tomatoes were harvested, the crop still needed to be transported to the cannery to get processed. On most farms, either the farmer or crew leader is normally responsible for the hauling. Hector’s father, on the other hand, used the large size of the family to his advantage in negotiating the use of his semi truck on the farm. He knew that his family alone made for a considerably large work crew because most of them were old enough to work. This made them very valuable especially on farms where there was plenty of work, but very limited housing available. In these desperate situations, contracting the hauling to Hector’s father was a reasonable bargain for farmer looking for a sizeable work crew. Little did Hector know as a child what the semi truck would come to represent and the significant impact it would have on his young adult life.

K-12 Experience

Hector and his siblings were always in Ohio for the beginning of each school year where they continued their education late into the fall semester as their father hauled sugar beets through the end of October. Their move back to their home base in Harlingen, Texas, was the
only school interruption they experienced each year. Hector claims that he never felt the stress of transitioning back to his home school in Texas.

I can’t say that school was harder at one school or another. When we checked out of school here and left to Texas, I didn’t find it hard at all. Most of what they were doing over there was the same thing we were doing here, just different books and different teachers, you know.

Hector and his siblings finished each school year in Texas. I was curious to know if he believed that he would have had a difficult time adjusting to school in Bowling Green, Ohio if he would have enrolled in the spring to finish the school year in Ohio. Although this will never be known, Hector did experience two school interruptions in one year when they moved to Georgia for the first time to pick onions. This was Hector’s junior year and obviously a very critical time to completing the necessary requirements to graduate from high school. Although he was unsure of himself at first, Hector did manage to transition smoothly into an entirely new school system.

The only new school I remember going to was in Georgia. We went there when I was a junior in high school because my dad wanted to try picking onions. He heard that there was good money picking onions in Georgia. So we went. Wow, there were more Black people at that school than there were Mexicans or whites. That was a first time for me. I didn’t know what school was going to be like, but after the first day I saw that it wasn’t all that bad. I made friends really easy. Some of the black girls even liked me [laughs]. My brothers and sisters also didn’t have a big problem at that school. Actually, I kind of liked it. It would have been nice to go back, but we didn’t make a lot of money in the onions. The work was too hard and the pay sucked so we didn’t go back.
I asked Hector about his favorite memories of school. His favorite school moment involved his father granting him special permission to drive to school in a newly purchased family vehicle. When my dad bought a new truck, well it wasn’t new. It was like a year or two old. But when he bought it I had already learned to drive even though I didn’t have a license because I wasn’t 18 yet. The best memory I have of school was when he let me drive the truck to school for one day. Man, that was awesome! We had just put some new rims on it with some low profile tires. We bought some spoilers that went all the way around that truck that matched the paint. It was badass. It didn’t look like a low rider at all, but the White kids in school called it a low rider just because we were Mexican. They had no idea what a low rider was. They said it looked like a Mexican truck. [laughs] I don’t know what that means.

Wondering if he misunderstood the question, I asked Hector if he had any good memories that happened in the school. He talked about two separate incidents that happened at school, but I felt that he struggled to think of some examples. Finally, Hector admitted that “school was school. It wasn’t all that exciting, but it wasn’t bad either.” To Hector, driving their family truck to school was in fact his favorite memory of school.

I then asked Hector if he had examples of any bad school experiences. Sadly, Hector shared a very personal story of humiliation he experienced that has left him baffled to this day. My worst moment in school has to be when I got in trouble with the janitor. The bathrooms at the high school didn’t have doors. So it was embarrassing to sit there doing your thing and guys coming in and knowing you’re there stinking it up. So one morning before school started I walked over to the junior high and went to the boy’s bathroom there. But I locked the door from the inside so no one would come in. I guess some kids
had tried to come in and found the door locked and told the janitor. The janitor unlocked it and came in shouting at me wanting to know what I was doing. As I was sitting there on the toilet, I told him that I trying to use the bathroom. But he kept yelling wanting to know what else I was doing. I didn’t know what he meant but I finally realized that he probably though I was doing drugs in there or something. I was so embarrassed man. He didn’t make me go down to the office or anything, but if he would have I would have gone home. No way man, that would have been too embarrassing for me to explain to everybody why I had locked the door. [laughs] But I can’t believe that he thought I was doing something illegal or something. I always wondered if he would have thought the same thing if it had been a white kid in there instead of me.

On the topic of favorite teachers, Hector was fortunate enough to have people who cared for him and refused to see him fail. Even though he was a migrant student and had work responsibilities every day after work, his high school algebra teacher, Mr. Smith, never allowed Hector to make excuses for submitting incomplete or late assignments. His algebra teacher expected him to always be prepared for class and have all school work turned in to him before the end of the school day. Although some people would perceive this unwavering attitude as cruel and unusual, Hector found it empowering.

Most teachers would have felt sorry for me and would have given me an extension or something. Not him. He knew that if I didn’t do it [homework] that day, I wouldn’t get it done at all and I would fall behind. So he expected me to get it done before the end of the day and turn it in to him. But not only that, he would ask me if I had any questions and he would explain anything to me if I didn’t understand. He wouldn’t let me fall behind. And
let me tell you what, Algebra is hard, man. I wouldn’t have passed it that year if it was someone else teaching it so I’m real thankful.

Spinning the question around, I asked Hector if there were any teachers during his K-12 experience that he disliked the most. While Hector never considered Mr. Smith to be racist or discriminatory in his demeanor towards him, Hector did quickly recognize the cultural ignorance that his freshmen English teacher demonstrated in the classroom.

She was cabrona [cruel], man. She was always saying stupid things. Like one time there were three of us [migrant students] in her class and she asked us one day in front of the rest of the students how the tomato picking business was going. What kind of a dumb-ass questions is that? Or one other time she said that learning Shakespeare was like learning to speak a foreign language. Then she turned to the 3 of us and said, “Right guys?”… Hector states that other migrant students who sat in her English courses that year eventually became upset at the constant careless remarks she made. I asked Hector if any action had been taken against this teacher.

She was stupid! Some of the other migrant students wanted to turn her in to the principal because they thought she was being racist, but I told them I wouldn’t be part of that. I didn’t think she was racist, I just thought she was stupid and ignorant. I didn’t have too many teachers like that.

On the topic of guidance counselors, I asked Hector how much of an impact they had on him in school. His responses with a question, “They did my schedule for me [laughs]. I mean, that’s what they were for, right?” Hector was convinced that their responsibility was to prepare their course schedule and make sure that all requirements were being met to graduate from high
school. I then inquired about any information that his guidance counselor might have shared or discussions they may have had about college.

Oh hell no man. College? No. I don’t know why they didn’t share college information with me. I wasn’t interested in college, but they never talked to me about it. Maybe you had to make an appointment with them or something. But no, they never sat me down in their office or anything to talk about college.

Hector does recall speaking to a college admissions counselor through a summer migrant education program he attended in the summer. He explains that an annual college fair was sponsored where admissions counselors from different universities in Ohio converged at a particular site where migrant students were bussed in to learn about the college admissions process. The universities used this opportunity to recruit students to their institutions. Having complete access to knowledgeable staff and college information through these fairs, Hector never took complete advantage of these situations.

College wasn’t for me. I just wanted to finish high school and get out. It wasn’t something that interested me. I wanted to be a truck driver not a college boy. Every chance I had to go with my dad hauling, I went. I always knew I would be driving truck. A high school diploma was something I wanted to have just in case I changed my mind later on.

On the subject of high school, I asked Hector if he ever experienced any major challenges as a result of the migratory moves they made as a family. As expected, Hector struggled with his earned secondary credits counting towards graduation. Since there are variations in state graduation requirements across the country, the difficulty of transferring certain courses from one school to another was a common problem for transitory children like Hector.
That was screwed up, man. In Ohio they’re telling you that you need to take this class and that class. But then you get to Texas and some of the classes don’t transfer. That’s messed up. So that’s why I was going to that summer night school program I was telling you about for migrant students. If I didn’t go, I wouldn’t have finished school when I did. I’m telling you it’s messed up.

Although the issues concerning the transfer of secondary credits had been a problem, Hector was able to graduate from high school on time. Eventually, the courses he completed through the summer migrant education programs provided just enough credits he needed to graduated his senior year.

Hector has no regrets for the choices he made so there is nothing he would want to go back and change. He did not consider the migratory lifestyle too difficult, so he did not express any regrets as a result of the experience. Hector affirmed that “everyone goes through hard times in life one time or another. That’s just life. I wouldn’t trade my experiences with anybody.” A positive outcome of the migratory experience for him was spending time with his family. The times he most cherishes are particularly those he spent alone with his father.

Family Culture

To start our interview session on family culture, I wanted Hector to share any great stories he had on living at home. Hector’s fondest memory of home was meal times with his family. Because of the small kitchen size, the entire family could not eat all at once. Hector shares how they ate meals together.

You’re going to think this is funny but some of my best memories was meal time at our house in the migrant camp here in Bowling Green. The house was tiny, only two rooms. And a little tiny kitchen. Only 3 people could sit at the table to eat at one time. The stove
was like 3 feet away. I mean the kitchen was really small. But as we were eating, the tortillas were coming out fresh and hot from the stove. We always had fresh homemade tortillas. Man, I miss that…. It was usually the boys who ate first, and then the girls. I don’t know why it was that way, but that’s how it was. If you didn’t want to wait your turn, you could make your own taquito and take it outside to eat if you wanted.

Sometimes the younger ones decided to do that if they didn’t want to wait which was okay.

Because the cabins in the migrant camps were relatively small, Hector’s family usually took up two cabins. Hector and his 3 brothers slept in one cabin while his parents and his 4 sisters lived in another.

The bond that Hector’s family shared seemed strong. This was evident by their interactions at work and at home. Even though they had the option to engage in various activities they could do independently, they normally elected to do activities that included the family as a whole.

In the evenings we would usually go outside and play volleyball. With ten of us, we always had enough for 2 teams [laughs]. My parents would also play. We would either keep playing until it got too dark or until we started arguing during the game. We really didn’t even know the rules of volleyball. We made up the rules as we played, but the rules were always changing too [laughs]. I guess that’s why we fought sometimes. It didn’t matter though because we were back at it again the following night.

Hector and his family did not always play volleyball alone. Others in the camp joined in to make it an even bigger event. I wondered what they did on rainy days when the weather did not permit them to play volleyball. If the weather was uncooperative, Hector states that they would move
their activities into one of the barns to play indoor basketball instead. Ironically, when the group went to the barn to play basketball, girls were not allowed to enter. When I asked why, Hector’s responds was that it just doesn’t look good. You have a guy coming out of the barn laughing and sweating and a neighbor girl walking out right behind him. Even though it’s all innocent, it doesn’t look right. So, no girls were allowed in the barn.

None of my other five participants remembered experiencing a family tragedy. Hector, on the other hand, shared a very personal event that dramatically changed their family’s life. When Hector was only in grade school, his father was a habitual drinker. He remembers his father anxious to get home one day to have a couple of beers with some of the men in the camp. Hector explains the terrifying details of that day.

When I was a little kid, I don’t remember if I was 7 or 8, my dad had been drinking. He and my mom got in an argument and he got in his truck and took off really fast. He didn’t see my oldest sister walking behind the truck and when he put it in reverse, he ran over her. He really didn’t hurt her because she was right between the back wheels of the truck. When my dad finally stopped the truck after he realized what was happening, my sister had ended up right under the transmission. No cuts or broken bones. My dad started crying so bad. He swears even today that it was a miracle, and it was. He could have killed her. But he stopped drinking that day.

This situation, which could have turned fatal, transformed his father overnight.

My youngest brothers and sisters never got to see him drink a beer in their life. They were either too young to remember or weren’t born yet. But the biggest thing that happened was that by dad turned to God that night. He became born again and ever since
then we’ve gone to church almost weekly. Sometimes two or three times a week.

Pentecostal people are always going to church [laughs], but I don’t mind. We got used to going all the time. I still do, but not as often.

Hector’s parents made sure that none of the children took their education for granted. Hector and his siblings were encouraged to earn a high school diploma although they were never pressured into it. Ultimately, it was left to each individual to determine their own educational outcome.

They were always giving us advice about doing good in school. They wanted to see us graduate from school, but they always left it up to us. If we decided that we didn’t want to go to school anymore, that was ok with them. But we weren’t going to be staying home not doing nothing. If we dropped out, they were going to drag us out to the field to work with them. Man, we busted our ass because we knew what would happen if we dropped out, so I think that was why we all kept going.

Neither Hector, nor his older sister Elena ever received academic assistance at home with school work. Hector could not rely on Elena for help because they were both in the same grade. Still, Hector felt that he managed well on his own and provided help to his younger siblings when they were struggling academically. Although Hector’s parents could not help them with their school work, they constantly read to their children at a young age through religious oriented material.

My dad read the Bible to us in Spanish. He did that a lot. I think he was hoping to make us good Christians by reading the Bible to us, but I don’t think he was trying to teach us the importance of reading [laughs]. He just wanted us to be good people.
When I asked Hector if they ever utilized the public library as a resource, he responded, “For what, books? No. We already had a library at the school where we could check out books. We didn’t need the public library.”

When I asked Hector about his parents’ involvement in school functions, he explained that their participation was based on the interpreting services provided by the school. For example, the only time Hector’s parents attended a meeting was if it was conducted in Spanish or if someone from the school was there to translate. Although all of the children were bilingual, their parents wanted the school to provide for their interpreting needs. Furthermore, if there were any issues that needed to be addressed in school, especially where the children went to school in Bowling Green, Hector’s parents called on the migrant recruiter who was responsible for identifying the migrant students in the area. Hector explains that she was the person that came to register us for school and for the summer migrant programs. She was Mexican and worked for the school. If my parents were mad about something at school, they would ask for Maria to come to the house and complain to her so she could go back and tell the school. “That’s what they get paid to do,” my dad said. In Texas we didn’t have that problem because almost everyone at school spoke Spanish. So they would go to the school there personally to settle things with the teachers.

Hector’s parents wanted their children to do well in school. Even if they did not plan to go to college, educational was still very important. They made school a priority and reminded them often of the consequences of dropping out of school. “If we started doing bad in school, then they would start warning us that there were plenty of rows of pickles to pick and that it was up to us if we were going to pick them or go to school.”
Community Connections

It was difficult to keep a large family like Hector’s fed. Because work came in cycles, it was crucial to know where to go for supplemental assistance. Hector admits that *las ayudas* [slang for supplemental assistance] was often necessary for survival.

We would get food stamps and stuff only when we needed them. If we weren’t working, *las ayudas* were real important because we were a big family. One hundred dollars in *estampillas* [food stamps] went a long way for us because mom made stuff like beans, rice, *tortillas*, *fidéo* and these things doesn’t cost a lot. Oh, and we also went to migrant agencies like Rural Opportunities for free food and clothes as soon as we arrived because before the migrant season started we were poor, man [laughs]. We weren’t going to see our first *cheque* [pay check] until we started working for at least a week.

Hector’s parents would make sure other people in the camp knew where to go for assistance. If there were families new to the community, his parents would give them a ride if they needed it. This was a way to build capital with families in the camp in case Hector’s family ever needed a favor. Therefore, Hector’s family rarely visited a new state for agricultural work. They felt lost and insecure without their social networks.

We never went to new communities. We did go to a different camp from time to time, but the town was the same. So it didn’t feel like we had moved to somewhere new because everything was still there, the same stores, the same clinics, the same mall. Everything was still the same. Even the people were the same. The school was the same…. We knew the people and this is where dad had all of his *compadres* from work and here we knew where everything was.
The family was very selective as to the farmer they chose to wok for each season. The only farmers that Hector’s family worked for paid their workers fair wages and treated them humanely. This determined that migratory pattern they followed each year and the places they returned to for agricultural work.

Most of them [farmers] were cool. My dad only went camps where he got along with the farmer even if the crew leader was worthless. There were even farmers who would give him an advance when he got to Ohio to buy what we needed before work started. They [farmers] knew that were didn’t have any money and that we weren’t going to have money until the first cheque, so they would give my dad a few bucks to get us through. Those were the farmers my dad stuck with the most.

Hector remembers a particular incident when the farmer they worked for decided to plant bell peppers instead of tomatoes for the following year in an attempt to increase his earnings. On the other hand, this same change would not have the same positive affect on Hector’s family. They strongly believed that tomatoes had a bigger income potential than bell peppers. As a matter of fact, their income potential would decrease if they returned the following year.

One time we stopped working for this farmer [in Ohio] that my dad had worked for like 15 years or something. They got in some argument about planting bell peppers instead of tomatoes for the next year and my dad refused to do that work. We made good money in the tomatoes and he didn’t want to so something he knew we weren’t going to make a lot of money in. So, the next year we went to work for a different guy. His farm was only like 10 miles away.

Even though they changed to a different employer when they returned to work the following year, they stayed in the same general area. It was important to Hector to maintain the
relationships with friends and family member that lived close by. They knew where the clinics, the agencies they would visit for las ayudas, and the schools the children attended were. These connections were critically important for Hector’s family.

The migrant camp, although simply a temporary residence until the family returned to Texas, was home away from home. It was a community where trust, respect, and conformity were expected. If you could not get along socially, you were not welcomed back the following season. And there were traditions within the camp that included birthday parties and the celebration that marked the end of the work season. But there was certain etiquette to follow in the camp to assure respect and fairness for everyone.

Birthday parties were always a big thing. The camp was small so it was impossible to celebrate anything without inviting everyone [laughs]. If you didn’t invite certain people, they would take it personal so everybody was invited. They would have cake for the kids and the men made a cookout because men don’t eat birthday cake [laughs]. And I remember that the farmer would have a pig for us to kill at the end of the season sometimes. All the men in the camp helped to cut up the pig and clean it. And no one was aloud to take raw meat home. That was rude. All of the meat was cooked that day and you only took whatever fit on your plate. If you were full and couldn’t eat no more, just walk away [laughs] and let everyone else eat. But everyone celebrated… If there was meat left over then that was when the leftovers were divided up between the people.

I asked Hector what he thought of the current condition of the migrant farmworker. I wanted to know if he believed the condition had improved over time or if it has become worse. His response was that he was not sure because he feels that he has been away from the migratory lifestyle for an extended period of time. He fears that the wages and the living conditions for
migrant workers have not improved since the last time he migrated with his family. Hector believes that if this does not change, “migrant work is going to disappear.”

**Resonance**

Hector embraces his migrant identity and has no regrets for the hard lifestyle he lived as a child. What made his transitory migration from Texas to Ohio special was that the experience was done as a family. His final words at the end of our interview captured what I felt was Hector’s migrant spirit even though he no longer works in that fields.

I never really had a problem with being migrant or living in the camps. My dad never took us to a place that was all run down. He never worked for guys who didn’t respect us as workers. That was one thing I learned from my dad. Choose whatever you want to be in life, but don’t let people treat you like dirt. That’s why I became a truck driver. I choose who I work for and how much I want to work. If I don’t like the way I’m treated I just go somewhere else. It’s that easy. I love what I do being a truck driver, but I didn’t leave migrant work because I hated it.
CHAPTER VII. MATILDE

Introduction

A few days in advance, each participant in the study received the interview questions to help them recall memories central to the topics that would be covered in each interview session. What was comical about my interviews with Matilde was her request to have the written interview questions in front of her during the actual interview even though she did not use them. Merely having the printed questions in hand seemed to give her a sense of comfort and the confidence she needed to dialogue with me.

Matilde and her family followed the Eastern Migrant Stream between Florida and Ohio. Matilde completed her senior year in high school while in Ohio. She currently works for a state agency in Ohio that serves the educational needs of school age migrant children statewide. Matilde has a great sense of humor and an incredibly optimistic perspective on life. Her upbeat attitude is evident throughout the chapter especially when she brings up the ill-fated situations in her life. Her spirit and energy is contagious.

K-12 Experience

Educational disruption is a dilemma faced by most children in the migrant stream especially when a migratory move happens during the academic year. Enrolling in a new school in the middle of the school year means adjusting to new peers and to a new curriculum. Before students can begin the adjustment period, they must first be enrolled in their new school and to do so requires the appropriate documentation for proper grade placement and to generate an accurate course schedule. However, many migrant students show up to their new school without the student records from their last school sometimes delaying the enrollment process. Matilde’s
family, who followed the eastern migrant stream from Florida to Ohio, often found themselves moving abruptly to their next migratory destination with very little time to prepare.

My parents never told us when we were leaving or anything like that. One day we were in school and the next time I see my mom picking up all these bags and then we were all jumping in the van and took off and we would be on the road for like a long, long time. I remember just hopping in the van, taking a two day trip, filling up the cooler full of bologna, all that kind of stuff and then waking up in Florida, and then um, trying to find a camp y de alli [and from there] I think it took us like two or three days before we even got into school. That’s really what I remember.

When families left abruptly, the children rarely had a chance to withdraw from school properly. I asked Matilde if she had left any unpaid school fines or if there were textbooks she could not return to her teachers as a result of a sudden migratory move.

Oh yeah, actually I have a lot of late fines somewhere [laughs]. Pero [but], I think for the most part especially when we were younger, I just remember I had a desk and then I would shove all of my stuff in there, and then if I left it [stuff] behind it didn’t matter because I knew when I went somewhere else the teachers were going to give me new crayons and stuff like that so I wasn’t attached to my books or anything like that. So if I did take library books it was because I really liked the books so I took them home, which I was not allowed to do [parent’s rule], and then I probably did have late fines and things like that. Nah… we didn’t even take our homework home or anything like that [laughs].

The decision to move suddenly was not always made irresponsibly. Although it certainly impacted a child’s school interruption, these moves were often calculated risks taken based on various factors critical to their survival. The family, for example, may come across the prospects
of another agricultural opportunity that pays well, but urgently requires them to be physically there to secure the necessary housing. Or, the decision can be weather related. In late autumn, Ohio residents can expect their first snowfall. Snowy weather can make for treacherous driving conditions. Thus, the climate can certainly influence the impulsive timing of migratory moves.

Our discussion shifted to the actual classroom setting. Matilde considers her school experiences in Florida uniquely different from what she experienced in Ohio. Her struggles learning the English language instigated in her an appreciation for the school system in her hometown in Florida. The bilingual resources available to non-English speaking students there made her feel like an active participant in the classroom. This was not so in the schools she attended in Ohio.

Here in Ohio I don’t think I remember having a tutor or anything except in the summer time que teníamos [when we had] summer school. But in Florida, that was what I really considered was real school because I could really participate in class. There was a maestra, una bolilla, [female Caucasian] and then there would be a teacher aid that would translate to the teacher if we knew the answer to the questions, so I felt I could answer whatever I wanted. Pero [but] in Ohio, I can’t say that because there was no way to ever tell her [the teacher] what I wanted to say. So I think that was the biggest difference. There were less mexicanos [Mexicans] over here [in Ohio] and I really didn’t consider this really a school. It was just somewhere that I had to go because I pictured my mom and dad wanted a break or something so they sent us to school, so we really did not perceive it as real school for us here in Ohio.
Matilde also saw a significant difference in the level of difficulty in the coursework between the states. Here again, she blossomed where support services provided a means of expressing her academic knowledge in the classroom.

Because I couldn’t follow what the teachers were saying, I thought that it was really hard [in Ohio]. So it made me feel like I wasn’t up to speed with the rest of the class. Pero when I was in Florida, I knew all of my material. I was just really good at figuring out stuff to the point that when I came back from Florida one year I completely skipped a grade because like I said, in Florida I was a lot more confident. There was a teacher aide that was right there. I could explain things to her and she could see that I was more advanced than the other students. So she took me to the side and was helping me with other stuff. So, the curriculum in Florida was easier just because I could actually have somebody that was there explain just a little bit deeper.

The experience of moving to a new school is stressful. The faces are different and the entire school environment is different. There are ways to cope with these differences and students seem to have a personal survival instinct to their method of managing their stress. “I was already self conscience about being able to read. In class I would count how many paragraphs there were before it was my turn to read so that I had a chance to read it to myself.”

Matilde also had the tendency to build an arsenal of what she calls “comebacks” for any potential verbal attacks from classmates; something she feared with each new school experience.

I think I made up some big scenarios of what would happen like when I went from Fremont to Gibsonburg, I was picturing like, ok, what if they ask me this, I prepared myself to, ok, I’m going to tell them this or I’m going to tell them that. I think that it was just kind of scary because I really didn’t know what it was going to be like. Just in case
somebody didn’t like me, I was going to have this comeback. And just in case somebody
did like me, I would already know what to say to that. I just felt I had to prepare myself
for any of these kinds of scenarios. It was scary for me because I just didn’t know what to
expect.

Even returning to school districts they frequently attended, she dealt with other types of fears that
were part of the stress of being the new student.

Every year I saw the same people like almost at the exact some time. It was kind of like
“Ay, ya llego so and so”. I already expected to see certain people. When I went back to
that school, I already knew I had friends there. So I didn’t have to worry as much. The
only thing I did have to worry about is did something change over the time that we were
gone. Did someone not like me anymore for some reason?

When asked to describe memories of her worst moments in school, Matilde oddly
explained that there were different levels, or “categories” to her bad school moments. In her
exceptionally positive demeanor, Matilde asserts that there were moments that she would even
consider as funny. But a bad moment she recalls took place in high school when her family
stayed in Ohio year-round for the first time ever. Matilde struggled to assimilate into the
mainstream culture

I put them in all different categories. But there were a lot of them that were bad but in a
funny way, and there were some that were really bad because I really looked stupid, and
then there were really bad because they were embarrassing. I would have to say that the
one that was really, really bad was when my parents were trying to settle out in Fremont.
My dad had gotten a job in the sugar beets and I had made some friends with three little
girls, eran todas bolillas [they were all Caucasian females]. And they would get to go
roller skating, or they would get to go out and do all this stuff. What was embarrassing was that um, that they were able to do all this stuff and I didn’t know what to tell them que we were too poor and that I could not afford to do stuff like that. I felt that I was different because I was not allowed to do stuff after school like all of my friends. All because I was mejicana, you know. And second of all was because I was surrounded by all these bolillos [Caucasians] and stuff. I felt I had to make myself be friends with them because now I was going to be settling out. Now that we were staying all year and the rest of the mejicanos were leaving to migrate south, I understood wasn’t going to see my friends in Florida. So I had to make friends with bolillos [Caucasians] now since we weren’t leaving anymore. So now it was more like “Oh, we’re going to go to the movies”, or “Oh, we’re going to go here or there” and that was kind of embarrassing because I could not do some of the same things because of our poverty.

Another negative experience surfaced when I asked Matilde if she had any least favorite teachers. The teacher’s name that quickly came to memory was Ms. Violet. Matilde claims that the dislike the teacher felt for her was very personal because it extended to other members of the family who had the misfortune to be in her class.

I had a teacher here in Ohio, Ms. Violet. She was really mean. She ended up making my sister pee in class because she wouldn’t let her go to the bathroom. It was because she [Ms. Violet] would try to make her say it in English and my older sister couldn’t say it. My sister would only say “pee”. She was my second grade teacher. I think she already had bad feelings toward our family because when that incident happened my mom couldn’t defend us. Pero, there was a tutor in school named Ms. Horacio who stood up and defended us in school against Ms. Violet. Ms. Violet liked us even less after that....
From there on out, anybody that had her from our family, she would just be mean to them. She was one of the teachers that I hated.

Although there various negative experiences she encountered in school as a migrant student, Matilde also claims to have had teachers that made her experiences in school positive and memorable ones. She gives one example of a teacher in Florida and one in Ohio.

I remember I had Ms. Dias in Florida. What I really liked about her was that she would take me to the side and she told me, “I know this is too easy for you, but just slow down so that the rest of the students can catch up. Pretend you don’t know a couple of words”. She made me feel like I was super smart. I did what she told me and would deliberately mess up. She made me feel, like, smart and that is what I liked about her. And in Ohio, I had a teacher named Ms. Burnstein. Because my desk was always a mess, she would always call me her Messy Bessy, you know. She [Ms. Burnstein] went out of her way to make me feel like I could do many things. She would say things like, “Wow, look at how Matilde draws” She always made me feel like I could do anything. So, one teacher kept it more private, just between us, you know. And the other teacher made it more obvious to the class.

At home, Matilde and her siblings were expected to take full responsibly for their progress in school. However, Matilde does not see this as a weakness. Her ability to cope with and adapt to constantly changing environments and meeting the strict educational requirements of the different schools systems they found themselves in seems to have given her the skill and the strength needed to persevere. Matilde credits her parents for this attribute that she feels she also shares with her older siblings.
My parents thought that we could handle it [school] on our own. It wasn’t like a big priority for them. They never went to parent meetings. They never did things like that. And I think that for them, just as long as they put us on the bus, took us to school, that they were doing their job. From there on out, “tu tienes que aprender [you have to learn]. If you fail, it’s you that is failing. Learning is your responsibility.” It’s not up to them [parents]. I don’t think the teachers made a big effort to try to show my parents that, hey they’re doing good in this, but they could do more if you could be more supportive. Like, they never went to school functions or anything like that. So, I really don’t think they [teachers] did that good of a job explaining to my parents what their role should be.

When it [parent meetings] was done in Florida, there was always something attached to it, you know. Va ver una comida [a meal will be provided], let’s do this, or let’s do that, you know. I even remember a time that my mom came toda vistidita [very well-dressed] come on, let’s go. But they didn’t really have to go because the school was able to write to them in Spanish, “Hey, tu hija no esta haciendo esto o el otro” [your child is doing this or that]. But Ohio schools were like, whatever, you know.

Although Matilde’s parents felt that the burden of learning and striving for academic excellence fell on Matilde and her siblings, there was a certain role they took in their educational process. The first role was that of consejero, or advisor to their children showing them the laborious side of the migrant lifestyle to motivate their children to stay in school. Their second role was to make sure Matilde and her siblings were ready to learn every day by providing them with the necessary school supplies and made sure they went to school with clean comfortable clothes.

Their attitude was that if we get an education, then we won’t have to be in the fields.

Pero [but] at the same time, I don’t really think they knew how to help us because their
English skills were so limited. If we came home and we needed help with certain materials, they couldn’t help us out. Except for mathematics because math is universal. I think they felt that they couldn’t help us out. They did make sure that we did have the basics. Here’s your breakfast, get ready to go to school, and go to school. And from there it was up to us to learn.

What Matilde found valuable to her educational experience were the migrant education programs that where available in most of the communities they traveled to for agricultural work. Florida had it, Gibsonburg had it, Croghan school. In Florida, I don’t know if it was because the area was so populated with *migrantes*, but I really don’t remember seeing bolillos. We had a program at Stamm school here in Fremont. So I did participate in migrant program.

In concluding our session on the topic of the K-12 experience, I asked Matilde about any regrets that she may have. I asked her if there was anything she wishes she could go back and do differently.

If I would be able to tell myself, “listen, this is what is going to happen if you don’t do this”. I think I would have taken school more seriously. With all the potential I had growing up, I just let it go because I just didn’t realize what I had. My goal was to find myself a man that wanted to have a family. Now that I see where I’m at, and realizing that I’ve been through a couple of men, I realize now that I should have thought beyond that. Cause like now I’m 30, I just had a kid, you know. I should have already graduated. That is what I would do different.

Although she regrets not continuing her education beyond high school, Matilde is not unhappy with her current relationship with her boyfriend and her baby. She does, however, realize the
academic potential she had to go to college which unfortunately her high school teachers and guidance counselors both failed to recognize.

Family Culture

Matilde is the second oldest in a family of eight children. She states that only the four oldest experienced the migratory lifestyle. The family settled out before the youngest of the four siblings understood the challenges that came with being migrant students. As a result, Matilde feels that the youngest four siblings take life for granted and do not share the bond that developed among the four older children. She describes this unique bond with her three.

I think it made us feel like we had to stick together a lot more because mom and dad were working. The oldest one was always left in charge of making sure that we did not destroy the house, or that we did not get into anything dangerous. Those of us, the oldest 4, always looked at it as having to look out for each other.

When confronting school related problems, Matilde and her three sisters were expected to work through those matters together without their parent’s support. The lack of transportation and the need to earn a living interfered with the parent’s inability to get involved.

If there were issues, it was something that had to be dealt with between us. If was hard for my mom to go anywhere porque no manejaba [because she could not drive] and dad was always working. So, any issues needed to be taken care of by us.

Matilde and her siblings experienced working in the fields at a very young age. She contends, however, that their involvement where not financially motivated. Matilde explains that the experience served as a lesson about life and about choices in hopes of inspiring them to look beyond the migrant lifestyle.
The money we made went to the family, but my mom and dad wanted to shelter us from that. My would say, “Vengan a trabajar unos surcos” [come and pick some rows]. This made us feel like this was something we did not want to do. I remember being 8 or 9 years old when I remember being in the fields picking pickles and in the tomatoes. But we weren’t forced. It was more like for the experience so that we knew what migrant work was all about. “If you’re not doing anything with your life, you’re going to be doing this.” So I was about 8 or 9 years old when they allowed us to be in the fields, you know. Or if my dad wasn’t there on some mornings my mom would take us to go help.

Maintaining respectable grades was important to Matilde. She describes her mother as a great source of inspiration and demonstrated the importance of an education by reading to them as children.

We had childhood Bible stories. My mom used to read those to us in español…. My mom learned to speak a little English on her own. She says she learned it from watching TV and that she picked up a couple of words from listening to us. And then we had to be careful because mom knows what we’re talking about, you know [laughs]. Pero, I think our education was important to her.

Matilde’s fondest memories of living at home included spending quality time with her family. A Sunday ritual that Matilde’s family shared when they were growing up best explains the priority they put on the family connections and what her parents did to nurture these relationships.

I really liked our Sunday ritual. My mom used to always dress us up for church every Sunday. I hated wearing dresses, pero just for one day a week I would feel like a princess [laughs]. I would wear like the nicest dress and we’d go out to eat together. And then we
went to my grandmother’s house afterwards. We always did family things like this. Even when we lived out in another county, we went to church here in this county [Sandusky County, Ohio] because this is where my grandma lived. So after church we would go out to eat, then go to my grandma’s house and stay there all day. And then afterwards go right back home. So, my best memories I think was just when we were around the family. Eating and just being around the family.

Community Connections

When Matilde’s family made a migratory move, they visited the Catholic Church upon arrival. This visit to the church to pay tribute to God not only reflected their fatalistic values, but also helped to get instructions from the clergy as to where they could go locally to seek available agricultural work.

My parents always felt that we had to give gracias that we made it all right so we would go straight to church. I believe that was where they were directed to where they could locate the campos. I don’t recall my dad calling ahead and talking to crew leaders or anything like that. We went to church and that was how we found out where we were going.

The church was a safe and reliable resource for food, clothes, and other basic items. The parent’s undocumented status was an enormous concern. Therefore, the family never accessed government-funded programs.

I think my dad was too proud. My mom said that they weren’t only too proud, but they were scared because if they found out that they weren’t citizens they thought they would get deported. So they never went to ask for food stamps of stuff like that. If we did get anything, it was from the church. Like Christmas gifts or a food drive. But my dad would
never ask for anything. And even if they brought it to the house, my dad would say, oh, just leave it by the door. He was just a real proud man.

Matilde’s recalls her father being very resourceful. Information proved to be valuable when applied in the right circumstances. Her father used his knowledge and experience to assist families to access the variety of resources available in the community. His influence extended to providing employment placements to Florida migrant families by linking them to farmers in Ohio in need of agricultural workers.

My dad was always a talkative type of guy. He always made sure that if anybody needed anything, he would help if he could. There were some families that we met in Florida and they would follow us back to Ohio even if they had never been to Ohio before. It was because my dad already had a place set up here in Ohio with a certain farmer. He would help the farmer by expanding his camp to include more trailer houses because my dad could deliver enough working families for a bigger farm. So, even though he wasn’t a crew leader, it had sort of happened that way. He wanted the families to trust him so he would always go out of his way to help them. Through his hard work farmers would come and talk to my dad to see if he could get them more people for their camps.

Matilde can remember how neglectful crew leaders often were toward the migrant workers they hired. Although her father was not a crew leader, this experience empowered him to advocate for the migrant worker. The compassion he showed to the migrant workers in the camp and his ability to create a positive and productive work environment coincidentally made him a leader among the workers.

I remember one crew leader and everybody hated him. And there were many crew leaders in Florida that were not taking care of their workers either. From learning from
that experience, I think my dad wanted to make sure the families didn’t end up like that.

Most crew leaders wouldn’t help their families for anything.

Although Matilde asserts that the migrant community consisted of relationships important for accessing invaluable resources and specialized skills found within the migrant camp, her mother often cautioned her about certain individuals living in the camp who would exploit others.

There were migrant families who would try to profit from other migrant families by selling them cans of pop at high prices. We weren’t allowed to hang out with them. There were times that there were people in the camp who didn’t have milk and stuff. My mom would give them some if we had it. But there were people who would take advantage of them in their situation so my mom did not want us to associate with them.

I asked Matilde how she views the migrant situation now. Matilde has been away from the migrant lifestyle for over ten years and through her present job has the opportunity to visit migrant families living in camps throughout the state. She believes that the condition of the migrant farmworker has definitely not improved.

When I think of the first homes we went to when I was a kid, they were awful. Sometimes the floors were made of dirt. There was no bathroom. There wasn’t a stove or anything. I’ve been to some camps and they’re really nice camps. But, you can still see some camps where the farmer really doesn’t care. So actually, it hasn’t improved at all.

Resonance

Matilde seemed to have had the adequate moral and spiritual support at home to successfully reach high school completion. Although her parents never experienced the educational opportunities that Matilde and her siblings had at their age, they understood the
impact that a high school diploma would have on their children’s future. However, the prospect of college was never discussed at home. This was a topic unfamiliar to the family with no one experienced enough to facilitate a proper discussion. What is more unfortunate in Matilde’s life history as a child of migrant workers is that the public school institutions where higher education information is most plentiful failed to provide her a fair opportunity in accessing the proper channels to make an informed decision. To my question regarding the impact she believed guidance counselors had on her educationally, Matilde explains:

When I graduated from school, I was never approached by my guidance counselor to see what I was going to do after [graduation]. You know, “What are your plans? What do you want to be when you grow up? Hey, what are going to do after school, or are you planning on going to college”. I just never thought that college was something that I needed to do or was even encouraged to do. The only discussions I remember was getting married, have a nice family, go to church; that what I was put into. The guidance counselor that I had, I don’t even have a face in mind because like I said they never spent any time with us. I don’t know if they did with the other [non-migrant] kids, but with me I know that they didn’t. In junior high in Gibsonburg, I don’t think there was any need for a counselor to talk to us about college. I think I talked to a guidance counselor because I think they gave me my class schedule, and then that was it. There never told me that if I planned to go to college, this is when my grades are going to start to be important. Just, “Here’s your class schedule”.

One can only wonder what choices Matilde might have made differently if teachers and counselors would have invested time in her to make an informed decision about higher education as a possible post-secondary option.
CHAPTER VIII. LEE

Introduction

Lee and his family followed the Midwestern Migrant Stream between Texas and Ohio to pick mainly cucumbers and tomatoes. Although he disliked leaving his friends behind to come to Ohio each year, he was always attracted to the allowance he made from working with his parents in agricultural work. While Lee’s parents never pressured him to graduate from high school, they constantly reminded him of the hard life that comes with migrant work as motivation to keep him interested in school. Lee’s formal education ceased when he completed the tenth grade.

K-12 Experience

Lee seemed to have a difficult time adjusting to the school system he returned to each year in Ohio. When I ask Lee to explain the most obvious differences between his home school in Texas and the school system in Ohio, his response was:

In Texas I had all of my Mexican friends and my girlfriends [laughs]. It was a lot of fun hanging out with them after school and on the weekends. In Ohio I had friends too, but we were always working so I didn’t hang around with them that much.

Interested in learning more about any differences he noticed in the curriculum or school culture, I rephrased the question. Therefore, I asked if he thought the level of difficulty in the classroom was harder in one school than the other.

Yeah, the school here in Ohio was harder. They didn’t have people to help you like tutors and stuff. They gave me my books and my schedule on the first day and that was it. And I had to sit there like the rest of the students and just learn like that, without no help. In Texas, my school had aids and stuff I could go to them for help if I didn’t understand something. They weren’t really teachers, but they helped explain everything better. By
junior high, school just got harder for me. I felt like everyone was so ahead of me in school and I just couldn’t catch up. I tried, you know, but I guess I couldn’t get it. It was hard.

Lee was obviously more excited about his Texas school where he feels he experienced more academic success. Apparently, the bilingual aides who were hired to provide supplemental help in the classroom offered Lee the extra support he needed in school. Quite the opposite was true in Ohio where aides were not utilized by school districts to help Lee and other students like him who were struggling.

It was not often that Lee experienced the stress of enrolling in a new school, but he did occasionally when the family moved into a new school district in Ohio. Here again, Lee’s concern was the social aspect of school. He was more concerned over fitting in with peers than acclimating to a new curriculum or following a different set of graduation requirements.

It was a little scary. Like, you don’t know anybody. I waited until somebody would talk to me so I could start making friends. Usually if there were other migrant kids around, I would make friends with one or two of them. But sometimes I would also make friends with the White kids. Some of them were cool, but I didn’t really go to many new schools.

We usually went from Santa Rose to Gibsonburg each year.

Moreover, when I asked Lee to share his best memories of school, his response focused on the social activities with his peers. Unfortunately, the types of friends he made sometimes affected his behavior in school which often put him in unfavorable situations. Lee recalls

Hanging out and goofing off sometimes [laughs]. Sometimes we got in trouble, but it was for little things. Sometime we did get in big trouble. I usually behaved, but sometimes the kids I hung around with were real caga-palos (jokers) and I got into trouble.
When describing his worst memory of school, Lee recalled an altercation he had with a school teacher regarding stolen property. Even though he maintains his innocence, this dispute upset Lee enough that he withdrew from school in Ohio and did not return until their arrival to his home base school in Texas three weeks later.

My worst moment? I would have to say that my worse moment was with my eight grade teacher here in Ohio. She never really liked me. *La tonta* [the dummy] accused me of stealing her purse. Not her purse, but her wallet that was inside the purse. She kept me after class and tried to make me tell her where it was and I told her I didn’t have it. She tried to threaten me that she was going to call my parents and I told her to go ahead, but that they [Lee’s parents] didn’t have a phone. She got even more mad because she thought I was making a joke out of it. But I was being serious; we really didn’t have a phone at home so I wasn’t lying. So she makes me pick up my books and things and took me to see the principal. The principal like automatically believed the teacher even though she [the teacher] admitted that she never saw me take it. So he [the principal] gets all mad at me and tries to act all big shot and wanted to scare me. Finally I just said “Fuck you all” and walked out of the school and started walking home. But the principal and some other guy, the vice principal I think, came running after me. I was already off the school property when they caught up. He started being all nice to me and apologized and stuff and told me to just go back to class and forget about it. I was going to keep walking cause I was still pissed, but I knew he would probably call the police on me if I didn’t go back. Besides I lived like five miles away. That’s too far to walk. I only went to school another week and told them we were already leaving to Texas so I checked out of school early.
It is not surprising that Lee could not name at least one teacher that he considered his favorite. He refused to give credit to any teacher for even the slightest gains he made educationally. The teacher aides that were part of his school experience in Texas, on the other hand, were the only school personnel Lee praised for their efforts.

Na, they [teachers] were all the same. Always nagging at you to do your work, but they never tried to help you for anything. I liked the aides though. They were always helpful. And they were nice too. They explained things better and they were more patient. But that was only in Texas. In Ohio, they didn’t have aides like that.

Not surprisingly, Lee was able to provide the names of several teachers who were his least favorite. He claims that these teachers all detested him, but he never offers his insight as to why these teachers may have felt a dislike towards him. But it is obvious that he holds a very low opinion of the educators who were part of his K-12 experience.

Well, there’s the eight grade teacher who said I stole from her. She’s one. My math teacher in the ninth grade in Texas never liked me. He was a football coach and he was only nice to his football players. I never did any sports so from the first day I checked into his class, he was always rude to me. I could never say anything bad to him cause I knew that the football players in that class would probably beat me up after school or something. Sometimes I’d skip his class and he wouldn’t know. Oh, and my second grade teacher Ms. Sweenie. She always treated me like I didn’t belong with her class. It was like I bothered her or something. She treated me different, but I never did anything to her. So I don’t know why she was like that with me. If the class was talking a little too loud, she always blamed me. If I didn’t do my homework, she would make sure the whole class knew. She would always write on the board the names of students who didn’t turn in their
homework. My name was always up there. But she never asked me if I could do it or not or if I needed help. I flunked the second grade that year.

Lee does, however, insist that he would not initiate the problems he encountered in school in relation to teachers’ negative attitudes toward him. He remembers making a sincere attempt to earn their approval until he got older and gave up trying to impress them.

I just knew it. I could always tell on the first day of school which teachers were going to be a problem. But I always sat there and tried not to give them a reason to get after me for something. When I got to the junior high, I didn’t care anymore. I started having more fun in school. Besides, I was going to get in trouble for something anyways.

On the topic of guidance counselors, Lee was not able to remember any of their names and was unsure of what their true role was in the school except for handling scheduling issues. “Um, they gave me my schedule whenever I checked into school. And then I had to see them again when it was time to check out of school before moving. But, that’s it.” I asked Lee to share any conversations he had with guidance counselors about the prospect of college in his future, he seemed puzzled at the question. “College? Nobody talked to me about college. That was for the smart kids.” Lee did not consider himself as a smart student and was baffled as to why I would think a counselor would want to talk to him about college.

Lee did remember signing up at the guidance counselor’s office to listen to a college admissions officer talk about the entrance requirements to his institution, but was turned away last minute.

I remember when a college counselor came to talk to students at my school in Texas. You had to sign up in the office. A couple of my friends signed up to go hear him speak so I signed up too. I didn’t know what to expect. Then they called us down to the guidance
counselor’s office. When I came in my guidance counselor asks, “What are you doing here?” I told him I wanted to hear the guy speak about college. He sends me back to class telling me that it was only for juniors and seniors and I was only in the tenth grade. This would become his first and only sincere attempt to learn about college experience.

Coincidentally, this was also the same year that Lee dropped out of high school.

I was curious to find out about Lee’s participation in migrant education programs. Lee did in fact participate in a summer migrant school program in Ohio, but never attended for the entire six-week session. His attendance in the program was dependent on the weather. If work was called off on a certain day because of wet rainy conditions, Lee would often attend the program.

I wondered what Lee would do if he could go back in time and change anything about his past. As negative as his K-12 experience was, he often wishes he could go back and finish the last two years of high school that he missed.

I only made it through to my sophomore year and I stopped. Wasn’t that stupid of me? I can’t believe it. But I was failing a lot of courses at that time. Even though I was at the junior level I really didn’t have enough credits to be a junior. I really wasn’t going to graduate on time so I thought what the hell. I was way behind and I knew I would have to keep going to school for a couple more years just to graduate from school and I thought, nah, that’s too much. So I stopped…

Now I want to make more money than I’m making now, but I need a GED to do that. I can’t apply for good jobs without it. So, I think I would go back and try to finish school this time to at least get the diploma. Man, I could have been making some good money right now, making about $12 an hour or more.
The difficulty he encountered finding a job as an adult makes him realize now just how important it is to have a diploma. Therefore it was of no surprise to me that in five years Lee plans to complete his GED.

Family Culture

Lee has an older sister who graduated from high school and went on to become a nursing assistant. Then he has a brother who is one year younger who also dropped out of school after the tenth grade. Finally his youngest sister eloped with her boyfriend before finishing the ninth grade. Therefore, Lee is the second oldest of four siblings. Lee’s father went to school in Mexico and only completed the third grade while his mother made it to the seventh grade in the U.S. before dropping out of school completely.

Family ties were very important to Lee. One of his fondest memories of living at home was a challenge that his mother proposed to the family one summer to motivate them to work hard in the fields to earn in an effort to make as much money as they could before the end of the season.

I have a lot of good memories, but the best ones was when we had money to spend. When we had money we were able to go places together and buy stuff. Like one time we made enough money to go to Cedar Point [amusement park]. We had never gone to a place like that before. I mean we went to the carnivals and fairs and stuff but those don’t cost a lot of money. But Cedar Point is expensive, you know. But my mom told us that week that if we made a certain amount of money to take back home to Texas, that whatever extra money we would use to go to Cedar Point. So we busted our ass all summer, my brother and sister and me and we did it. It was the best time we ever had. We didn’t eat all day
cause it was too expensive to eat there. But that’s okay, we were too busy riding the roller
coasters to think about food [laughs].

The trip to the amusement park, although memorable, was not as important to Lee as how they
got there. The family came together for a common goal and when they succeeded, everyone
shared in the celebration by spending a day at Cedar Point.

The rituals that Lee and his family shared further illustrate the strong bond they had as a family. The “cook-outs” they had regularly were more than just for sustenance. This was what brought them together routinely as a family.

It didn’t have to be a Saturday or a Sunday. If we came home real tired from work, my
dad would tell my mom, “Take out the chicken thighs, we’re going to grill out tonight.”

If it was someone’s birthday, “Let’s grill out”. If we had a day off from work because it was raining, “Let’s grill out”. Sometimes we forgot what holiday we were celebrating, but there we were grilling out. It was something we did all the time. While us boys were outside cooking the meat, my mom and my sisters were inside the house getting the beans, the rice, and the tortillas ready. When they were done, they came outside and joined us and we would spend the evening joking and laughing all the time. But it’s amazing how many cook-outs we had.

Lee admits to working full days in the fields harvesting migratory crops next to his parents as early as 10 years old. When I asked him if he or his parents knew that the legal minimum age for working in agriculture is 12, he responded:

Yeah, we knew. The farmer knew and he didn’t say anything. But I didn’t see it as something bad. I was helping my parents make money. We were poor. I mean, what was I going to do? I couldn’t stay home and watch T.V.
This confirmed why Lee had attended summer migrant education programs sporadically. Even though the summer program offered a fun place for him to go and receive the academic support that he so desperately needed, the chance to earn money and buy things for himself motivated him to want to work in the fields instead.

They didn’t pay me to go to their school. It was a fun place to go when we weren’t working like when it was raining. But if there was work, I had to work and I wanted to work. At 10 years old, my parents were paying me $20 a week to pick pickles. Most of my friends didn’t have $20 allowances at my age [laughs].

I was particularly interested in what Lee’s parents attitudes were about education. It seems obvious that a hard working ethic was an important skill to learn at a young age, but I wondered if Lee felt that his parents were concerned about his progress in school.

My mom was always concerned I think. She always saw our report cards and if we weren’t doing good she would get mad at us. But it wasn’t like we were grounded or anything. She would just say like, “Ven cavesudos, si no estudian se van a quedar como burros!” [laughs].

Lee believed that his father also showed concern for his progress in school, but displayed it a little differently. While his mother preferred to express her anger openly, his father was more comical, yet strategic in the way he communicated with his children the importance of staying in school through completion.

My dad didn’t really say much. He would only shake his head a little when he saw an F on my report card. But he wouldn’t do anything. If we were out working in the fields and it was a really hot day and we were feeling hot and miserable, that’s when he would remind us of the pain we were feeling at the time when we would be working and use that
as a lesson. “If you don’t finish school, this is what it will be like for the rest of your life if you don’t get an education.” And then we would all get a big laugh out of it. [laughs]

Even though he was just trying to make us laugh, now I realize that he was also telling the truth. I’m big now and I’m an adult and it really is hard trying to make it to through the week with the little bit of money I make. And even though I don’t do migrant work anymore, I still bust my butt to try to make a living for myself.

Lee admitted that his parents did not read to him as a child. He did not give an extended response. Only that his parents did not read to him. When I asked him if his parents ever took him to a book store or a library, Lee responded,

Ah, no. Bookstores charged for books and my parents didn’t have money for that.

Libraries didn’t charge but we never went to a library. That wasn’t something that my parents ever introduced us to. Come to think of it, you know, I don’t know why they never took us to a library if the books were free. That’s a very good question. I’m going to have to ask my mom that question.

With a seventh grade education, Lee’s mother was capable of providing substantial tutoring at home and made every attempt to utilize what educational knowledge she had. Lee, however, seemed distracted by the social time he felt he was giving up with friends to work on school assignments. Lee describes how he avoided his mother’s help in completing his homework to be with his friends instead.

I remember she was pretty good with math when I was in elementary. She would try to help us, but most of the time I wouldn’t bring my homework home. If she knew I had homework, she wouldn’t let me go outside and play until I was done with it. So,
sometimes I would leave it at school on purpose so she wouldn’t know that I had
homework [laughs] and that way I was able to go outside and play.

Lee’s parents attended school functions regularly in Texas. His mother’s insistence to
monitor their progress in school was another way she demonstrated the educational concern she
had for her children. While at the school, Lee’s mother did not hesitate to express any concerns
she had with teachers or administrators. Ironically, his father would not come into the school
building and instead stayed in the car waiting as long as it took for Lee’s mother to get through
the meeting. He always drove her to and from the school sponsored event even though Lee’s
mother had a driver’s license and was perfectly capable to getting to the school on her own. But
this was what Lee’s father perceived his role to be as a responsible father.

At home before they drove to the school, Lee’s mother usually prepared her thoughts
before addressing any of the teachers or administrators about the concerns that she had. Lee
shares how his father played a role in preparing his mother before each encounter.

Sometimes the night before when my mom was very upset and made up her mind she
was going to the school and talk to so and so because of how we were treated, my dad
just cheered her on just to get her more excited. He’d say, “Y les dices vieja, que no esten
chingando o les vas a poner la ley!” [Tell them wife, not to mess with us or you’re going
to sue!] [laughs] and he would start laughing. Of course that would make my mom even
more mad and excited to go in there and fight for us. My dad was such a *buscaplaitos
“instigator” [laughs].

Community Connections

For Lee’s parents, one of the integral parts of making an interstate move was accessing
whatever supplemental assistance was available. They were knowledgeable of the resources in
the area and knew which ones they were specifically eligible to receive. Lee was specific in listing the most common ones.

We made sure we stopped at the food stamp office as soon as possible. We always qualified for those types of services because we never made a lot of money. At the end of the season we got unemployment, but I remember it really wasn’t very much. My mom made sure we had Medicaid in case we got sick or something. And if she knew that there was an agency giving out free clothes or free food, we stopped by and check it out too… My mom wasn’t embarrassed to ask people in the camp or the farmer if they knew where to go for these services.

Lee states that his parents were helpful to other migrant families in the camp by explaining to them how to qualify for certain programs and where to go to apply. But, they never transported anyone in the camp in the family car to access these resources. Since they family went everywhere together, there was little room left in the car for additional passengers. “When my parents had to go somewhere, no one was left behind. We all went. So there wasn’t much space in the car for anyone else.”

The migratory pattern that Lee’s family followed to Gibsonburg each year was determined by the continual success they experienced on the same farm although they had also worked briefly for other farmers in neighboring towns. When I asked Lee how his parents chose where they migrated to for work, he stated that it depended on what work there was that year and if the crew leader had a house for us in the camp. We never moved somewhere unless my parents knew where they were going and if there was enough work for us. But we kept going to Gibsonburg because there was always enough work and a place to stay in the camp.
The importance of having friends and family living in nearby communities did not seem to be very significant. Whether it was mere coincidence or just a result of years working in the migrant stream, many of Lee’s relatives have always worked in the same geographical area.

We have aunts and uncles and cousins who are migrants like us. Sometimes we’re in the same camp, but most of the time they’re at a different camp nearby. I don’t know if it’s that important that they were here in Ohio with us, but it was useful because they would tell us where there was work if we had trouble finding work. Or we would help them if they ran into trouble. So yeah, I guess.

Lee mentioned the existence of *compadres* within their family network. I asked Lee to explain how thought the *compadre* relationships were formed within the migrant community to which he responded:

Well, like, there was this guy and his car broke down and he didn’t know how to fix it. Well, my dad knows a lot about cars and about fixing engines. My dad offered to fix it for him for free. Later on when my dad build a shelf for our kitchen because it broke, this guy was really good with carpentry so he offered to build it for my dad. They became good friends and later they were *compadres*. They still call each other from time to time.

Of the six participants in this study, Lee was the only one who experienced a tragedy event that occurred in their migrant community. Lee explains in detail how the families reacted as neighbors and friends to a disturbing domestic violence situation within the camp.

A guy stabbed his wife once. He thought she was cheating on him so he stabbed her, and then he disappeared for a couple of days. The lady was in the hospital for a while. But I remember everyone in the camp was afraid that this guy was going to come back and hurt someone so everyone was on the lookout to see if he would come back. That’s the first
time I remember seeing a bunch of guys with guns out in the open getting them ready in case the man came back to the camp. The police caught him a few days later in the next town. We never saw the man or the lady again.

Resonance

Lee was honest about the negative experiences of being a child of migrant farmworkers. He feels that he was denied a full educational experience with the same opportunities that most children have in America. Because of the transient nature of the migratory lifestyle, Lee feels he was always falling further behind until it was too late. When I asked Lee what he thought was a negative outcome of being a child of migrant workers, he believed that it was

being treated like a migrant…. Everywhere I went I was treated different by the teachers and I think it was because I was migrant. They never invested their time in me because they thought I couldn’t learn or that I couldn’t make something of myself. I think that if I settled out and wasn’t a migrant I would have been treated better, like they would have cared more, you know what I mean. Sometimes I think they couldn’t wait until I left school. So I never felt like I belonged anywhere. *Ni de aquí, ni de alla.*

It is obvious that family unity was very important. Lee believes that his parents cared deeply about his education and does not blame them for not completing school. On the contrary, Lee takes full responsibility for the choices he has made including dropping out of high school.

As long as there was school, they wanted us in school instead of working. That kind of changed when I got to high school. When they saw that I wasn’t doing good anymore [academically], then they stopped making me go to school. This time they put me to work. If I wasn’t going to go to school or if I wasn’t going to take it seriously, I was going to help them earn money. And that’s what happened…. When we got to Texas
from Ohio, that’s when I decided to drop out of school. My parents were okay with it and we just didn’t tell the school that we were already there. But then they found out and I had to start going again for a few months on and off. I was always skipping school and getting into trouble and I wasn’t doing any of the work anymore. The school finally knew that they weren’t going to get far with me so they laid off until eventually I just stopped going.
CHAPTER IX. JUANITA

Introduction

The Eastern Migrant Stream is the path that Juanita and her family followed each year from Florida to Northwest Ohio. Her father was born in Mexico and her mother was a U.S. citizen. Juanita has two older siblings and one younger sister. Sadly, Juanita’s life story includes the tragic loss of both of her parents as a youth in separate incidents. Juanita’s attempt to minimize the educational gap between her and her classmates was a challenge that continued throughout her school experience with little academic support from home. Eventually Juanita dropped out of school and got married at the age of 14. Without a high school diploma and too young to land a mainstream job, Juanita and her husband continued earning a living the only way they knew how in the migrant stream. What follows is Juanita’s experience before she left home to start her own family.

K-12 Experience

Certain aspects of Juanita’s school experiences were quite different from those of my other participants. What sets her apart was that fact that she did not attend kindergarten before entering the first grade. As a result, Juanita believes she was not ready for the first grade. Furthermore, she didn’t start the first grade until the second half of the school year which put her academically behind the rest of her classmates. Although Juanita was born and raised in the U.S., the family never used English in the home which made it even harder for her to keep up with the curriculum. Juanita describes what that first day of school was like for her.

I felt like there was this door in front of me and when they opened it they announced this is your new student. I felt like they pushed me from the back and closed the door behind me. And to me it was like, and now what happens. And one of the things I remember
from that first day was given a sheet with a picture of a rake. I knew what it was in
Spanish, but I didn’t know what it was in English. To me it was so hard trying to
comprehend. In my mind I know what it was, it was a *rastrío*, but how do I say it in
English. Most of the time I felt like I was lost. I didn’t know what was going on. And, uh,
a lot of my papers were wrong.

Unfortunately, this was only the beginning of the many challenges she would face
throughout her K-12 experience. Juanita attributes these challenges to her struggle with English.

When asked to describe her worst moment in school, Juanita said

One of the worst moments that I can think of was when one time they told my mom that
they needed to put me in special ed. classes. I didn’t understand then why they wanted to
do that and my mom was very assertive and she said “no, my Juanita is not going into
any of those classes.” But now I know that it was because of my language and they
weren’t ready for something like that yet. And now I think, wait a minute; I wasn’t
supposed to be there in the first place. I think that with things like that, your self-esteem
goes really low because you get pulled out from your regular class and kids are like, why
are you in there, you shouldn’t be in there. That’s the worst time I think that I can think
of growing up.

Ironically, the happy memories she has of school are very limited. When I asked Juanita
to tell me about her favorite memory of school, she was rather slow in giving a response. She
thought for a moment before giving me an answer.

Oh my goodness. That is a very hard question for me because, it’s not that I didn’t
experience anything that was good, it’s just that I felt that I was struggling throughout the
whole school experience. From the time I entered the first grade to my freshmen year, I felt it was a struggle.

She did not seem satisfied with her response so I allowed her more time to ponder the question. I suspect that she may have felt dissatisfied with her response, so she finally followed up her answer with this comment:

I guess the only thing I can think of was when I was in the first grade when the school I was at had a Christmas program because I had never participated in anything like that. I still remember when they dressed us up in blue skirts and white shirts and getting us ready to come up to the stage to start singing. I think that was my best memory that I can think of.

While her positive school experiences were minimal, Juanita was delighted to discuss her favorite teachers with me. She talked very highly of her sixth grade teacher, but it was her fifth grade teacher that left the biggest impact on Juanita. The compassion and understanding that she exhibited to Juanita the year her father passed away was paramount to Juanita’s psychological state during this very tragic time in her life. Juanita explains:

When I started learning, my favorite teacher was in the fifth grade. She was the best teacher you could have. You know what, she was the meanest teacher, but that was where I learned the most. I don’t know if it was because I was scared or the fear of her coming up to me and say, what do you mean you don’t know, I just told you. But you know, I think that was where I learned the most. When I was in her class, my dad passed away. Through her, I saw a different person when that happened because she was more caring, she had more patience, and she was more tolerable. I saw that she was making a special effort towards me. She was the kind of teacher that you didn’t know if you should raise
your hand or not because you feared that she would yell at you or something like that. So, even though she was like that, I still felt like she cared about me.

Even at a young age, Juanita has a keen memory of the school buildings she visited during her migratory journeys and how they were structurally different from one another. Although Juanita did not mention that these differences bothered her, they seem to have caused a distraction while trying to get acclimated to a new school environment and new school culture.

When I went into a new school it was strange. Even the whole layout was different because in Ohio the school was more like a square building and that was it. Everything was indoors. But when I went to the Ruskin school [in Florida] the school from the inside was like an open area. And that alone was very different from what I was used to. The structure of the building was very, very different. Just going from my classroom to the cafeteria, one of the images I have in my mind is walking from the corridor from my room to the cafeteria where they had, like umm, double doors with screens. It was totally different. I can’t really explain, but the structure was just totally different for me.

Juanita recalls sharing with her mother every letter the school sent home, so she feels the school did their job in communicating with her parents. However, these communications initiated by the school were mostly done in English which Juanita’s parents could not read. When I asked her how her parents communicated with the school, her response was that there was rarely any attempted to visit the school or schedule a meeting with teachers unless it was absolutely necessary. Furthermore, if there were any school functions that the children wanted to attend, her oldest brother took the initiative to drive them.
Although most of the communities Juanita moved to with her parents offered migrant education programs, she did not participate. The only time she recalls attending such a program was in preschool when she was about 4 years old.

Our discussion shifted to the topic of guidance counselors and the impact they had on her K-12 experience. Juanita’s interaction with her guidance counselors was practically non-existent. She confirms this by remembering the name of only one, Ms. Mayfield because of another unforgettable moment where she feels the school failed to see her true potential to learn. She describes this momentous interface with her counselor and the inadequacy she felt within herself.

I spoke to her maybe once. We were scheduling our classes for the following year, I can’t remember if it was for the eight or the ninth grade, and I wanted to take some other classes. Even though I was struggling, I wanted to make sure I was in the same courses as my friends. I remember when I picked the classes, she came up to me and say, “You know what Juanita, I noticed the classes you wanted to take and I don’t think you’re ready for those classes. If you’re struggling with the classes you’re taking now, you’re not going to make it through these other ones.” So that was a huge blow for me right there. I thought wow, I must be that bad. That was the only time I ever spoke to her.

As an adult, Juanita is able to look back at this particular situation with more mature perspective and feels that the counselor was probably looking out for her best interests. Juanita realizes now that the courses she had pre-selected may have presented too great a challenge. Still, she feels that the counselor could have articulated her intentions in a clear way that would not have been perceived as demeaning by Juanita.

She basically told me that I couldn’t do it. I don’t think she tried to sit down with me to explain it a little more thoroughly and give me an option that maybe I could do it this
other way to help me succeed. She never did that. I was very discouraged at that point. I knew I was struggling, but that confirmed it even more.

Before Juanita completed the ninth grade, she dropped out of high school. She met the man in the migrant stream in Florida who she married. Juanita was 15 when she left home. Up until she left school, no one including her guidance counselors or teachers had ever spoken to Juanita about the prospects of college. No one had ever asked her what her thoughts were on the subject.

That was something I never thought about, and it was something that was never brought up. I don’t know if it was because they saw me struggling or what, but no, it was never presented to me.

To summarize Juanita’s perception of her K-12 experience, she feels convinced that she was denied a fair and equitable education because of her migrant identity. “I would have to say that I felt cheated because of the lack of education I received. Because I was working in the fields, I feel like I was cheated of a proper education, and the knowledge.” From the time Juanita started school abruptly in the first grade, she continued to feel ever more hopeless with each passing year struggling to catch up with the rest of her classmates.

The challenge I faced was knowing that if I was falling behind now and I’m not capturing what I’m supposed to be learning, this is just going to set me back more and more because of the moving really made it hard. I remember that it was very hard. I don’t know if it was because of the curriculum or what, but I remember that I felt very lost when I was in Florida. And when I arrived to Ohio I felt lost…
I just felt like I didn’t know what they were doing at all. How I managed when I was down there, I don’t know, but it was very, very hard for me. Just when I was capturing what was going on in school here in Ohio, when I got to Florida I was totally lost again.

Through all of the disappointments Juanita encountered in school, she was still able to find a silver lining in a seemingly gloomy childhood. When I asked her what was the most positive outcome from her migratory experiences as a child, she responded with conviction that family unity was the most paramount. She feels that the migratory experience brought them closer together than most non-migrant families.

Family Culture

Both of Juanita’s parents were educated in Mexico even though her mother, who only completed the third grade, was born in Texas and is a U.S. citizen. Her father only completed the first grade. Juanita has many fond memories of her parents. When I asked her to describe her favorite memories living at home, they included special moments she spent with her mother and father.

Having both of my parents by my side. Having my father climb a tree to pick a few cherry for us. Lying in the grass with him. My mom playing records and hearing her sing, seeing her dance. They were very nice parents.

Juanita’s family also shared certain rituals together that may seem insignificant to some people, but to Juanita these rituals remind her of home. Fridays in particular hold a very special meaning to Juanita.

Going to the drive-in in Bascom, we would all jump into the pickup truck and go see Mexican movies. It was always on Fridays. Also on Fridays, my older siblings would go
with my dad to do the grocery shopping. Sometimes my younger sister and I got to go
with my father to do the shopping.

Juanita can remember being taken to the fields as young as 3 or 4 years old. Her parents
would give her and her little sister an empty paint bucket to pick cucumbers. She wasn’t
expected to fill a certain quota with her little paint bucket. Juanita explains that since they did not
have a babysitter, her parents were forced to keep the children with them in the field throughout
the work day. Instead of letting Juanita and her little sister run around the field and risk getting
hurt, they gave the children a choice of either playing inside the family automobile parked near
by or filling their little paint buckets with cucumbers along side their parents. Juanita was age 12
when her parents finally put her to work harvesting cucumber and tomato in Ohio and expected
to contribute to the family’s income.

On the topic of parent’s attitude toward education, Juanita felt that she did not receive
enough encouragement and educational support at home even though she stated that education
was important to her parents. She went on to say the following:

I think maybe they saw it as something they needed to do by law which was to send us to
school. Education was important, but at the same time I remember my oldest brother
having problems learning in school. He failed a couple of times and finally when he
turned 16 he had enough. He quit school and started working with my dad at the foundry.
I asked then her if she felt her parents were concerned about her progress in school. Juanita never
mentioned her father in her response, but this may have been because he passed away when
Juanita was young. Instead, Juanita seemed to have reported her successes and shortcomings to
her mother as well as her brother who offered academic help when Juanita needed it.
In the beginning I remember bringing papers home and showing them to my mom, especially when I did good. She would sit there with us and talk. As I got older, she never really asked me about school anything. She would look at my report card and sometimes ask me why I wasn’t doing good. I’d tell her that I wasn’t getting it and I remember sitting down with my brother as he tried to help me with my homework. But I don’t think she realized what was going on in my education.

Juanita does recall one situation where her mother felt compelled to meet with a teacher who was mistreat Juanita in the classroom.

In the seventh grade she came to school with her *comadre* when I was having trouble with that male teacher. My mom felt that he needed to be a little more tolerant with me.

My mom’s *comadre* went with her because she knew how to speak English and my mom didn’t know how to speak English. So she did the talking for my mother.

These *compadrazgo* relationships were prevalent throughout Juanita’s life story. However, how Juanita referred to them did not appear to be in the traditional “godparent” role. It seemed as though compadres in her examples were close friendships that her parents had established within their social networks. Juanita explains:

I do remember growing and picking out in the fields, the farmer had his own *gente* [crew]. We would always have my mom’s *comadres* and their kids working next to us in the fields. Not that we wouldn’t make new friends, but my parents seemed to stay close to their *compadres*. These same people, *los campadres* and their kids, we all grew up together. And to this day we still continue to see each other once in a while… I don’t know how they came to meet each other. But they met each other by working out in the fields. I don’t remember how exactly they became *compadres* or anything, but they were
at one point migrant families and that was how they met. But those relationships continued even after my parents passed away.

Juanita remembers her mother reading to her at a young age. On the topic of accessing the public libraries, however, she seemed surprised when I asked her if she had even been taken there by her parents to check out books.

Oh no, never. The only time was through school. Fremont use to have this old Winnebago they called Old Betsy. And the bookmobile came to our school. But my mother would always tell us not to bring books home because if they get lost, you’re responsible for them. And if you lose them, we’re going to owe money. Most of the time I had to tell my teachers that I couldn’t take my [library] books home, I have to leave them here at school.

As a result of her father’s death when Juanita was in the forth grade, money became even more important for the family’s survival. Although Juanita was expected to work to help provide for the family when she turned 12 years old, her mother still made sure that she and her siblings had every opportunity to complete their homework. This was evidence to Juanita that her mother put more priority on school than on work.

When we got home from school she wanted us to be changed into our work clothes and do our homework. And once we were done, someone came by and picked us up and took us to work. Mainly it was total survival for us during that time.

Community Connections

When Juanita traveled the eastern migrant stream with her family, they rarely applied for federal assistance like food stamps. For reasons she can not recall, the family was often denied federal assistance. She acknowledges that her parents were not familiar with all of the available
services and how to qualify so they usually would not seek these types of resources except for unemployment benefits. The health and wellbeing of the family was important so it was necessary to understand where in every community they could go for free or reduced medical services. However, when Juanita’s father knew that he did not have very long to live, he made every effort to apply for whatever federal assistance program he could for his family before his passing. Unfortunately he was denied assistance yet again.

Before my father died, I remember he tried to put things in order for us. When he got out of the hospital, I think he kind of knew. So he tried to go and help us get the resources we would need, but I remember that he got denied for some reason. After he died and it was now up to my mom, she didn’t even try to go back to apply. I think it was an ego trip not to go back. So we never got any federal assistance that I can remember.

Juanita’s family was different than most migrant families. Where temporary free housing available only through migrant camp living is necessary during a migratory move, Juanita’s family preferred to spend the money to rent living space away from the rest of the migrant population.

Um, in my situation growing up, we would never live in a camp. We would always live on our own. We would work for the farmer, but we would never live in a labor camp. My dad wanted to keep it that way. They [Juanita’s parents] didn’t like to have many people close by. Since we did not live under the supervision of the foreman [crew leader] because we lived on our own, my parents would communicate directly with the farmer. Even when a crew leader ran the migrant camp and managed the harvesting of the crops, Juanita’s parents preferred to discuss the condition of their employment with the farmer instead. A good working relationship with the farmer was important to Juanita’s father. He needed to
know that if he ever requested a letter from the farmer to verify work history for unemployment benefits that the farmer was willing to provide it without hesitation. But even more important to the family was the kinship they developed with the farmer. If the farmer valued his workers, this was the kind environment Juanita’s parents wanted for the family. Juanita illustrates this point.

What I do remember one time here in Fremont, there was a farmer on Route 20 and we developed a really good relationship with him. The farmer would sometimes even take me on the tractor with him. And his daughters got to know my older siblings very well, so they developed a relationship. The farmer’s wife would always have cool-aid and cookies for us at her house. My mom would always remind us not to go over there a lot. *No esten molestando la gente,* you know, stay over here. But the farmer’s wife would call us to go over there. I remember one time, it was around Christmas time, at our house they had left a box of gifts and Christmas candy there for us that we found when we got home. I’ve been able to go back and thank her and tell her how grateful I was. I told her that the happiest part of my childhood was having been able to have met her. I remember when my sister turned 13; she wanted to be a part of it. She helped make a party at the camp for her.

Juanita’s parents were first generation migrant workers. Since the rest of their family resided in Mexico, they were alone working in the migrant stream in the U.S. This may have been why her parents sought to have a good working relationship with the farmers. So, when they started migrating they did not have family members or close friends to turn to for help and guidance.
When we were migrating, there weren’t any other family member who was migrating.
But it became helpful when we met people. So even if you didn’t know them, it was
important to form some sort of relationship. It made it better. It made it easier.

The first transitory moves they made in search of agricultural work determined the basic
migratory pattern they would follow each year from Florida to Ohio. Revisiting the same
agricultural destinations eventually helped to make the necessary community connections for
building their social capital.

To end our final interview together, I asked Juanita what she thought about the current
situation of the migrant farmworker experience. I asked her if she thinks it has improved over the
years or if things have gone unchanged. Working for a social service agency that serves migrant
farmworkers throughout Ohio, she offered a hands-on perspective having visited countless
families working a numerous migrant camps statewide.

In some sense it has improved, but then you have those camps that have been
grandfathered in as far as upgrades being done to those camps. Um, those are the camps
that still look the same or have gotten worse. I like going to the camps through my job
because it brings me back to reality. That’s what keeps me going. Not that I need a
reminder to know where I came from, but I know it kind of helps me to realize how far
I’ve come. The conditions have changed for the newer camps because they have to have
the indoor plumbing and stuff, but you still have those old ones that are not very nice at
all.

Resonance

Although Juanita’s K-12 experience was cut short in the ninth grade, she does not seem
to have any regrets. When I asked what she would do differently if she could go back and
change anything about her past, I expected the obvious answer which was to graduate from high school. Instead, Juanita understood all too well the realities of her circumstances. She remembers the struggles and frustrations she endured to merely stay afloat academically and has since come to the realization that those who were responsible to educate her failed. Instead Juanita offers the following response to my question which best describes where she believes changes would need to occur educationally before she could go back and have a reasonable chance of completing her compulsory education.

In my situation, I think that it would be hard to advise little Juanita because all of the problems started on the first day I entered school. In order to be able to give myself some advice, I would first have to give advice to the teachers. If the whole situation would have been different with the teachers with them knowing a little bit more about my background, my culture, I think things would have been a whole lot different. So, I don’t think I could go back and do it because the teacher would have to change first before I could change my situation.
CHAPTER X. LIFE HISTORIES AND ECOLOGICAL FACTORS

Introduction

The purpose of this life history study was to explore the ecological factors for academic success of six adult Latinos in Northwest Ohio who followed the migrant stream as children. The ecological factors separately investigated in this study consisted of K-12 experiences, family culture, and community connections with the primary purpose to understand educational outcomes. After completing an analysis of the lives of each individual participant, their stories were juxtaposed to build assertion yielding intersecting themes and patterns. The conceptual model below (Figure 2) illustrates the ecological factors that impacted the educational outcomes of the six participants.

Figure 2. Conceptual model of ecological factors.
The study centers on how parents, school, and community played a role in the academic success of migrant students. When these separate systems intersected in the personal life stories of each participant, specific themes and ecological factors affecting educational outcomes emerged. This chapter provides a detailed description of the intersecting themes outlined in the conceptual model with the thread of family evident throughout.

Parents’ Contribution

It was evident that the parents mentioned in this study share one obvious similarity which is that none of them completed their formal education. Additionally, none reached the level of high school. See Table 2 below.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Grade level Completed</th>
<th>Schooling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Candelario</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Step Father</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hector</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matilde</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juanita</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table illustrates the distribution of grade levels completed by all of the parents in the study showing their limited educational attainment. The table also shows the country where each of the parents received their education, which for nine of the parents was Mexico. Only three parents mentioned in the study received their limited education in the U.S. Their low educational attainment can negatively impact the level of academic assistance and guidance provided at home. Matilde stated, “If we came home and we needed help with certain materials, they couldn’t help us out.” Hector explains, “My parents weren’t checking our homework or tutoring
us if we needed help… that stuff was up to us to figure out.” The parents’ educational experience in a developing country like Mexico had unique social and economic characteristics not found in the U.S. As a result, the navigation of the mainstream U.S. educational system as parents proved to be a challenge and unequivocally influenced the lives of my participants growing up in the migrant stream. As explained earlier in the literature review, this cultural framework ultimately defines their role as parents in the educational process of their children as they perceive it to be. Unfortunately, their reality and understanding of their role conflicts with that of the mainstream culture by which U.S. schools vastly operate. These differences, although inconsistent with the dominant culture, add value to the overall educational experience of the child. What follows is an illustration of the cultural dynamics in the research found during the data analysis process.

Consejos

When there were problems evident in school, most of the participants’ parents were usually reluctant to intervene. In extreme cases where the participants were treated unjustly, parents seemed compelled to get involved in an advocating role for their children to negotiate a fair and acceptable outcome. In my interview with Matilde, for example, her parents made it clear that any problems at school were problems she needed to resolve herself. “I think my dad just wanted to get involved if something bad was happening. But other than that, ‘You handle it’ he would say.” On the other hand, Lee’s mother participated most at school sponsored activities although her participation was limited to Lee’s home school in Texas. His mother attended school activities and parent-teacher conferences often, but limited her participation to the school system in Texas, rarely visiting the Ohio schools. However, Lee never offered an explanation for this inconsistency. Candelario also could not explain his parents’ lack of school participation even though he felt they cared about his academic progress. “I don’t know if it was because they
weren’t bilingual. But even in Texas they didn’t attend school functions.” Hector noted that his parents were more likely to visit the school if bilingual interpreters were made available. “They knew English pretty good, but they were never comfortable using it. So if the meeting wasn’t in Spanish, they wouldn’t go.” Even though parents hesitated to become involved in their children’s educational process none of the participants in the study described having parents who did not value education.

This same reaction was true concerning their parents’ minimal involvement in their formal education. In spite of their parents’ limited educational contributions, all participants were convinced their parents demonstrated concern over their educational progress. This is consistent with the article by Valencia and Black (2002) in which they contend that Mexican American parents demonstrate concern and participation in educational issues through internal home behaviors. While tutoring instruction was significantly limited due to parents’ low educational attainment, one way they displayed educational guidance and support was through *consejos*; nurturing advice and moral lessons (Valdez, 1996). To encourage academic perseverance and reinforce appropriate behavior in school, participants recall their parents constantly reminding them of the harsh realities of agricultural fieldwork through their *consejos*. Matilde, for example, stated:

I remember being eight or nine years old when I remember being in the fields picking pickles and in the tomatoes…. It wasn’t what they wanted for us. It [work] was sort of a lesson…. If you’re not doing anything with your life, you’re going to be doing this.

Hector also described the *consejos* passed down to him by his parents. In the following, Hector openly admits how he and his siblings were free to determine the extent of their education, but was reminded constantly by his parents of the consequences of dropping out of school early.
They were always giving us advice about doing good in school. They wanted to see us graduate from school, but they always left it up to us. If we decided that we didn’t want to go to school anymore, that was ok with them. But we weren’t going to be staying home not doing nothing. If we dropped out, they were going to drag us out to the field to work with them. Man, we busted our ass because we knew what would happen if we dropped out, so I think that was why we all kept going until we finished.

Lee’s father, on the other hand, waited to give consejos about the importance of finishing school while working in the fields. Here, Lee explains how his father looked for the most physically stressful moment in their workday to drive his message about the importance of school.

If we were out working in the fields and it was a really hot day and we were feeling hot and miserable, that’s when he would remind us of the pain we were feeling at the time when we would be working and use that as a lesson. “If you don’t finish school, this is what it will be like for the rest of your life if you don’t get an education.”

As for the other three participants, their parents demonstrated regard for education through positive reinforcement and by personally reviewing their grade cards. It is important to mention that there was no distinction between the types of consejos passed down to the male participants and female participants. The consejos parents offered centered primarily on the educational advancement of the children regardless of their gender.

Early Literacy

The migrant parents in this study demonstrated that reading to their children at a young age was important. While reading proved to be important, those parents in the study who engaged in reading activities with their children used bible stories and religious materials as their choice of genre. In their research, Arzubiaga, Rueba and Monzó (2002) found that when families
are engaged in literature that is religious in nature, children think of themselves as readers.

Ironically, of the four participants who stated that they were read to as young children, Candelario was the only one who claimed visiting the public library on occasion with his mother to read books and check out materials to take home. The rest of the participants admitted that the only library they were familiar with was their public school library. Moreover, Juanita offers an explanation as to why her parents never permitted her to take library books home from school.

My mother would always tell us not to bring books home because if they get lost, you’re responsible for them. And if you lose them, we’re going to owe money. Most of the time I had to tell my teachers that I couldn’t take my [library] books home; I have to leave them here at school.

Except for Candelario’s mother, the parents mentioned in this study seemed to lack an understanding of the library system as an institution which can have an extraordinary impact on their child’s academic success in school. This could be attributed to a lack of exposure to these types of systems. Nonetheless, their restrictions to accessing places like the public libraries do not undervalue the importance of education. Instead, these Latino migrant parents incorporated experiential knowledge and understanding based on their own cultural frameworks and mental models to develop internal home behaviors that value education.

Social Capital

A prevailing theme that emerged in the life stories of my participants was a firm reliance on interpersonal networks developed in their migratory journeys. For most, these networks guided the direction they followed each year to the same farming communities in Northwest Ohio in search of agricultural work. There were valuable resources and information to be gained from building social capital. “Having friends and relatives with migratory experience improves
the efficiency and effectiveness of the job search to yield better jobs and higher wages”
(Aguilera & Massey, 2003, p. 672). What follows is an explanation of the social and interpersonal networks within the migrant camp community as described by the participants and how these networks functioned to enhance social capital.

**Community Culture**

The migrant camp community as described by the participants is a unique phenomenon. The relationships formed in the camp are often long term and reflect the dynamics of *familismo*, or familism as discussed earlier in the literature review. “*Familismo* includes the desire to maintain strong family ties, the expectation that the family will be the primary source of instrumental and emotional support, the feeling of loyalty to the family, and the commitment to the family over individual needs and desires” (Halgunseth, Ispa & Rudy, 2006, p. 1,285).

Although individual families may start off as strangers when they first arrive to a new migrant camp, relationships are quick to form. These relationships take on characteristics similar to the *familismo* system in that there is a firm desire to maintain strong kinship ties as well as a commitment to meeting each other’s needs. Developing these strong ties has a direct impact on building social capital within the migrant camp community. Candelario substantiates this claim as follows:

> I think it was key because if your car broke down, there was always someone who would take you to the store if you needed the help. These were friendships where you could depend on the other families to help you out in your time of need.

Sandra and Hector also stated how their parents openly offered transportation to members of their camp community when making visits to certain social service agencies. Hector describes how his parents approached families who needed to access the food stamp office for assistance.
If my parents were going to the food stamp office they would ask anyone in the camp if they wanted to go. They usually took another couple with them. They [his parents] were like that because maybe one day we would need help from someone in the camp or something, I don’t know. That’s just how they were.

Lee further explains how his father used his skills repairing automotive engines and what he gained long term as a result of his servitude in the camp.

There was this guy and his car broke down and he didn’t know how to fix it. Well, my dad knows a lot about cars and about fixing engines. My dad offered to fix it for him for free. Later on when my dad build a shelf for our kitchen because it broke, this guy was really good with carpentry so he offered to build it for my dad. They became good friends and later they were compadres. They still call each other from time to time.

Matilde showed how her father used his established network in Northwest Ohio to attract potential workers in Florida earning him a reputation.

My dad was always a talkative type of guy. He always made sure that if anybody needed anything, he would help if he could. There were some families that we met in Florida and they would follow us back to Ohio even if they had never been to Ohio before. It was because my dad already had a place set up here in Ohio with a certain farmer.

It became obvious that people who lent their specialized skills and talents or provided certain services to their fellow neighbors and friends stood to gain status within that migrant community. These relationships of mutual benefit often created strong bonds between individuals and families forming a kinship resembling what the literature refers to as compadrazgo. What follows is an explanation of how this fictive kin relationship is defined within the migrant community.
Los Compadres

The term *compadre* was used on several occasions during the interviews. Earlier, Lee explained how his father and a gentleman in their migrant camp developed a strong friendship through valuing each others unique skills. Through their reciprocated efforts, both men saved money they would have had to spend to get the work done professionally. Although no child in either family was baptized establishing an official kinship through traditional religious means, these gentleman demonstrated that they valued each others friendship by addressing themselves as *compadres*. Additionally, Hector asserted that the connections his father had made over the years in the same community kept them returning to Northwest Ohio. Here, Hectors refers to some of his father’s close friends as the “*compadres* from work” establishing that it was a nontraditional kinship:

I think friends and people we knew well was important because I think that is why we kept coming back to the same place. We knew the people and this is where dad had all of his *compadres* from work and here we knew where everything was.

In Juanita’s case, she states that *los compadres* were relationships that were discovered through the migrant experience. These relationships were long term and for her incorporated the entire family.

They met each other by working out in the fields. I don’t remember how exactly they became *compadres* or anything, but they were at one point migrant families and that was how they met…. We would always have my mom’s *comadres* and their kids working next to us in the fields. Not that we wouldn’t make new friends, but my parents seemed to stay close to their *compadres*. 
Sandra’s mother, on the other hand, drew from the capital she had generated within the migrant camp community to solicit help. In the following, Sandra explains how her mother accessed the interpreting services through her comadre network when she needed to visit the school:

When my stepfather could not go, my mother would look for a lady in the camp that she most trusted who could speak English. She would tell me, “I think I’m going to ask my comadre Manuelita to go with me; she owes me a favor.” And that was how she would find someone to translate for her in school. Once I got older I did all the translating for her.

Although it was not always evident which compadres or comadres mentioned in the study assumed that official role within the family, the familial conditions were ideal for establishing a compadrazgo relationship in the traditional sense.

School Culture

Discussions with the participants indicated there were extreme differences between the school districts in Ohio when compared to those in Texas and Florida. Some claimed that the Ohio school systems were better while others preferred their home base school in Texas or Florida. Both Candelario and Hector felt that the teachers in the Ohio schools were more helpful and refused to accept failure in their students. Sandra maintained that Ohio teachers better prepared her academically. Candelario describes the one major criticism he had about his home school in Texas:

I’m not too fond of the educational system in Texas. They would always push any Hispanic into like your auto mechanics, your cooking class, and stuff like that. I kind of felt that it [scheduling procedures] was more towards the migrant kids sometimes because
they would always put us in a class to do your homework and try to catch up on your work and stuff.

In contrast, both Lee and Matilde appreciated the supplemental educational resources available to them in their respective schools of Texas and Florida. The one resource they both valued most was the bilingual teacher aides. Matilde asserted that having the bilingual teacher aides present in the classroom made it easier for her to actively engage during in-class discussions. Lee explains how fundamentally important teacher aides were to his academic development.

Yeah, the school here in Ohio was harder. They didn’t have people to help you like tutors and stuff. They gave me my books and my schedule on the first day and that was it. And I had to sit there like the rest of the students and just learn like that, without no help. In Texas, my school had aids and stuff I could go to them for help if I didn’t understand something. They weren’t really teachers, but they helped explain everything better.

Additionally, the findings showed an obvious difference in the participants’ perception of teacher roles and attitudes towards migrant students. What follows is an analysis of school culture through exploring the perceived roles teachers (and guidance counselors) played in the participants’ K-12 experience.

Teacher Role

All of the study participants articulated the characteristics of a great educator through their own individual experiences. For Candelario, the teachers he most admired were those who “went out of their way to make you feel comfortable and strived to make migrant students part of the school community.” Hector appreciated teachers who “wouldn’t let him fail,” or let him use his work responsibilities at home as an excuse for not completing his class assignments. Juanita valued teachers like Ms. Fletchner who demonstrated patience through her academic struggles in
school. Sandra described her favorite teachers as strict and demanding. “I guess they saw that I had potential. I didn’t see it myself, but they did. So, they pushed me and I really appreciated that.” Matilde found great comfort in being openly praised by her teachers. She states:

I had a teacher named Ms. Bose. Because my desk was always a mess, she would always call me her Messy Bessy, you know. She [Ms. Bose] went out of her way to make me feel like I could do many things. She would say things like, “Wow, look at how Matilde draws” She always made me feel like I could do something. I think that is what I really liked.

Lee, on the other hand, was the only one in the group who denied having a teacher he particularly liked declaring, “They were all the same. Always nagging at you to do your work, but they never tried to help you.” When the participants were asked to describe their least favorite teacher, only Candelario and Sandra, the only two participants who are college graduates in the study group claimed they never had a teacher they disliked. It appeared from this study that the more content the participants were with their teachers, higher educational attainment was gained.

Although all of the participants experienced being taught by Latino teachers at various time during their K-12 experience, almost everyone mentioned someone from the mainstream culture when asked to describe a favorite teacher. Only Matilde claimed that Ms. Dias, a Latina, had been her favorite teacher in school. Lee, who did not complete a K-12 education, was the only participant who refused to recognize the impact of any of his public school teachers.

On the topic of how schools communicated with parents, the findings indicated that schools corresponded primarily in English. Hector, Juanita, and Sandra acknowledged that letters sent home in English were the schools choice for communicating with their parents. Lee and
Matilde do recall letters sent home in both English and Spanish, but Lee’s parents were bilingual so for him this was a non-issue. Candelario was the only participant who claimed the schools had made no attempt to communicate with his parents.

Even though almost everyone remembered their favorite teacher, not one of the participants was ever approached by a teacher proposing the idea of college. Candelario was fortunate to be mentored by his sister who was attending college during his high school experience. Lee did not feel he met the academic aptitude to be approached by teachers about the prospect of college. “College? Nobody talked to me about college. That was for the smart kids.”

**Guidance Counselor Role**

Almost all of the participants felt an indifference toward the impact their guidance counselors had on their K-12 experience. The participants described a very limited role they perceived guidance counselors’ had within the school. They basically understood the guidance counselors’ role as designing class schedules when migrant students arrived to a new school and then processed their grade cards and transcripts when they were ready to transfer out. Outside the scope of these primary duties, the participants were unable to articulate a guidance counselor’s other relevant responsibilities. However, some noticed that they were not given full access to the services and resources available through the counseling office. Candelario describes how the counseling support given to students from the dominant culture at his school was not applied to him.

Guidance counselors, uh, the only time I would see them was when we were registering [laughs]. I mean, my parents would come in to register us. Other than that, I didn’t get any encouragement from my guidance counselors, you know, point you in the right direction like some of the other kids. I don’t know if it was because we were migrants…”
but us growing up it was like, ok you go to school and register and that was all you wouldn’t see of your guidance counselor again until we left.

Also, Hector was unsure why his counselors never discussed the idea of going to college with him when he was in high school, “Maybe you had to make an appointment with them or something.”

Some of the participants actually described their guidance counselors as having a negative impact on their educational outcome. In Juanita’s situation, her guidance counselor discouraged her from taking advanced level courses claiming that Juanita was not capable of handling the vigorous content. Juanita states, “I thought ‘wow, I must be that bad.’ I was very discouraged at that point. I knew I was struggling, but that situation confirmed it even more.” Her guidance counselor had focused only on her inadequacies convincing her to take more general courses instead. Additionally, Lee describes his one unsuccessful attempt to meet with an admissions counselor to learn about the college admissions process.

When I came in my guidance counselor asks, “What are you doing here?” I told him I wanted to hear the guy speak about college. He sends me back to class telling me that it was only for juniors and seniors and I was only in the tenth grade.

It is important to note here that both Juanita and Lee were the only participants in the group who did not complete their K-12 education.

Sandra was alone in commending her Florida guidance counselors for their positive influence over her decision to go to college. She described receiving support and encouragement mainly from two distinct individuals. One was a gentleman who served as the senior high school guidance counselor of her school and the other was a Latina who served as the migrant education
counselor. Together they organized trips to area colleges and universities. Sandra stated, “They took us on field trips to colleges so that we would know what to expect when we enrolled.”

Summary

Chapter X has provided a review of the ecological factors consisting of parents’ contributions, social capital, and school culture from the perspective of the six study participants. The quotations used assist in providing the essence of the individual stories while supporting the intersecting themes and patterns yielded in this chapter. The following chapter focuses on the major components of the study.
CHAPTER XI. DISCUSSION

Introduction

It became very apparent to me from the interviews that the schools in Northwest Ohio showed very little interest in incorporating migrant families into their school community. This was evident through the schools consistently sending written communication home in English which most of the migrant parents mentioned in the study could not read.

“Most institutions are not prepared to bridge the gaps in knowledge and communication of intercultural relations; instead, each institution persists in expecting its client population to learn the nuanced and implicit meanings that characterize that institution’s written and oral communications. By default, then, it falls on minorities to gain the cultural fluency they need in order to interact advantageously with mainstream institutions” (Vasquez, 2003, p. 29).

This chapter discusses key ecological factors including resiliency in students, parents as organic intellectuals, stability and continuity, and migrant education programs found to impact the educational outcomes of the six participants in the study.

Resiliency in Students

I believe my participants demonstrated resilience throughout their K-12 experience to overcome the multitude of challenges associated with the migrant lifestyle. Even though parents could not provide adequate academic support at home, they demonstrated their priority for education through various means. For example, all parents mentioned in the study encouraged their children to do well in school and strive to finish their education through consejos, or “advice”, to inspire this objective. Although consejos is important to Latinos to instill particular values and encourage certain behaviors in their children (Franquiz & del Carmen Salazar, 2004;
Valdez, 1996), some of the parents mentioned in the study chose a more active role in their children’s education. One participant, Candelario, visited the library with his mother to motivate him to read more. So that her grades would not suffer, Sandra was not required to work in the fields on school days so that she could concentrate on her homework assignments. Latino beliefs and practices have a strong effect upon a child’s academic success. A common Latino belief, familism, has been identified as a family support network that provides social, emotional and financial support within Latino families (Viramontez Anguiano, 2004). Through these means, the participants gained the resilient disposition necessary to maneuver through the many barriers migrant students typically encounter in the K-12 setting.

An important aspect of resiliency as it applies to my research is how each participant responded differently to adversity. Rutter (1987) claims that resiliency is not always applied similarly to all situations. When asked to describe their favorite teachers, most of the participants mentioned educators who made education a challenge. They seemed to respect teachers who expected no less from their migrant students than they did their mainstream students. Candelario and Sandra, both college graduates, asserted that they did not have a teacher they disliked. Only Lee who did not finish high school insisted he did not to have a teacher he ever really liked. He even described an incident with a teacher and principal regarding a stolen purse which could be interpreted as racially motivated. Wayman (2002) suggests in his study that although student perception of teacher ethnic bias is not widespread among Latino students, it is more prevalent among those who drop out of school. I believe that although Lee and Juanita valiantly faced up to the challenges of school with resilience, they never maintained a positive attitude towards their environment which is important for coping with stress (Herbert, 1996; Demos, 1989). Both
felt that they were far behind educationally and were struggled endlessly to catch up. Eventually their resiliency was not enough and they dropped out while still in high school.

Parents as Organic Intellectuals

According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1985), the Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci claims that learning and thinking is a process that extends beyond the classroom. Gramsci introduced the concept of organic intellectuals. This concept is defined as one who develops intelligence and learning outside of traditional formal educational environments. He used the example of the parent activist and the parent organizer (1985). Within the migrant context, the classic example of an organic intellect was Cesar Chavez. Having been a migrant, he understood the suffrage of life in the fields. Thus, his tireless efforts to advocate for farmworkers without formal education or training were soon heard around the world. Sandra, Hector, and Matilde described one parent who exemplified the qualities of an organic intellectual and exhibited similar activist traits in their migrant communities without formal education or training.

Sandra’s mother was the most prominent organic intellectual in the group. Sandra described her as an advocate for the physical and mental wellbeing of migrant women in her community empowering them to see a doctor regularly and even providing transportation for those who needed to get to their appointments. And although her aggressive, unconventional approach of promoting better health in migrant women challenged cultural norms in the community and created friction at home with Sandra’s stepfather, she managed to overcome these barriers and established herself as a leader in the community. Her work as an activist continued until her untimely death after a long fought with cancer. Through her mother, Sandra became deeply involved in her community and has used her college degree to secure a federal
job where she currently works serving the state’s most socio-economically disadvantaged populations through federal assistance programs.

Hector’s father became a tremendous influence in his life. While money was essential for earning a living, it could not replace self respect and integrity. He was always mindful of how he and his family were treated by employers which was always a determining factor as to where he took his family each year for migrant work. Hector’s father utilized his organic intellectual skills including conflict resolution to negotiate better wages and improved living conditions for his family and for the families in the camps. Hector stated, “He never worked for guys who didn’t respect us as workers. That was one thing I learned from my dad. Choose whatever you want to be in life, but don’t let people treat you like dirt.” Hector became an entrepreneur leaving the migrant lifestyle for a career where he negotiates the conditions of his work environment as he was taught to do by his father.

In Matilde’s case, her father utilized his organic intellectual skills through problem solving to negotiate the labor market in his Northwestern Ohio community. His ability to understand the needs of both the migrant farmworker and the farmer helped to maintain a strong and steady workforce. As a result of his unselfish efforts, he became a leader within the migrant community. Matilde gained a valuable experience through her father’s actions. Having only completed her high school diploma, Matilde’s advocate nature led her to a job with a state funded agency where she supervises key staff that link eligible migrant children identified in Ohio to appropriate educational services. Matilde recognizes the impact she has had on migrant families through her current position and has plans to enroll in college in the near future with hopes of serving the migrant population in a higher capacity.
I found that the parents of two of my participants who did not finish school, Juanita and Lee, did not demonstrate traits consistent with organic intellectuals. And although both of their sets of parents provided consejos to encourage their children to work hard in school and graduate, it appears that consejos alone were not enough to keep them in school. However, Sandra, Hector, and Matilde asserted that their parents’ activist traits contributed to their academic success in school. This leads me to believe that an organic intellectual parent is a key ecological factor impacting the educational outcomes of migrant children.

Through their parents’ actions, my three participants (Sandra, Hector, and Matilde) discovered a purpose that was greater than themselves; accepting the notion that enhancing one’s quality of life is dependent on improving your community. Even more important than prosperity was their parents’ drive to instill in their children a sense of social consciousness and responsibility for community. As these parents were fighting for the rights of farmworkers, these precious experiences not only served as vital lessons in lives for my participants, but they paved the road to the formation of their migrant conscious and directly influenced their formal educational development by giving educational attainment a higher, more relevant meaning.

Social Networks

One dominant factor in the K-12 experiences of all six of my participants was their commitment to the migratory route they followed back to Northwest Ohio each year. Although some had visiting a different state a time or two, they eventually returned to their usual migratory pattern to Ohio. I also found that although none of the participants’ families worked for the same Ohio farmer for more that a couple of seasons, but still stayed to the same general area within Northwest Ohio. This way they could access the same community resources and could maintain the social networks they worked so hard to establish over the years (Stack, 1974). These social
networks are essential for the development of social capital within the communities (Maggard, 2004; Kozoll, Osborner & García, 2003; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Their consistency contributed to a wealth of social capital which would have otherwise been deficient had they visited new communities after every migratory move.

Migrant Education Programs

Consistent with the literature, school disruptions created educational discontinuity for my participants (Perry, 1997). A more serious problem described by my participants included how school interruptions affected their transfer of secondary credits (Garza, Reyes, & Trueba, 2001). Course credits were often lost in transition because of the variation in graduation requirements between states. Some of my participants had to consider alternative means to recover high school course credit they often lost during an academic year. They found relief through Title I - Part C, migrant education programs where they were given the opportunity to earn high school credit over the summer months.

All of my participants attended a migrant education program in Ohio. While the migrant education programs offer high school students the opportunity to earn secondary credit during the summer months, they also allow migrant students in all grade levels to make up for the content knowledge that is lost with each migratory move (Gouwens, 2001). However, their participation in these summer programs was significantly affected when they were legally old enough to work in the fields full time at age 12. For Lee, his attendance in summer migrant school programs was limited to rare days when there was no work. Once Sandra and Hector began working full time, the migrant education programs only became necessary again when they found themselves at risk of not graduating from high school on time as a result secondary credit transfer issues. Their economic contribution to the family was vital to their survival
(Donato, 2003; Carroll, Samardick, Bernard, Gabbard, & Hernandez, 2005) and in my participants’ case took priority over attending the summer migrant education programs.

Finally, the entire group maintained that none of their teachers in the K-12 setting spoke to them about the prospects of going to college. In Matilde’s case, the topic accidentally surfaced in one class a few weeks before the end of school her senior year when students were given the opportunity to speak about their post graduation plans. The only time Hector spoke to a college admissions counselor was through the summer migrant education programs in Ohio. Out of the entire group, Juanita, who did not finish school, has the least amount of participation in migrant education programs. It is clear to me that Title I – Part C, migrant education programs offers students the tools necessary for progressing educationally while in the migrant stream (Gouwens, 2001). Therefore, participating in these programs, in my opinion, improved their chances for K-12 academic success.
CHAPTER XII. CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I provide a brief overview of the study which includes limitations of the study, school leadership implications and recommendations, recommendations for further research, and the conclusion.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the environmental factors of six adults in Northwest Ohio who followed the migrant stream as children to understand educational outcomes. The ecological factors consisted of school, family, and community influences during these adult’s school age years in America’s public school system as they followed the migrant stream with their families. The guiding questions for this study were: A.) What are the educational experiences of children in the migrant stream; B.) What environmental factors are most conducive to academic success; C.) What perceptions do migrant students have of the public school system; and D.) What barriers do migrant students experience and how do they overcome?

In the role of the researcher section of Chapter 3, I made it explicit that I lived the life of a child of migrant farm workers. The rich experiences gained from being a child of migrant farmworkers provided me the cultural capital that I bring to this research to understand the lifestyle and the issues facing Latino migrant children in the U.S. today. As a result, my personal history served as the framework for the ecological factors researched in this study including; K-12 experiences, family culture, and community connections. Additionally these assumptions were fundamental in developing the guiding questions for this study. The intended audiences of my dissertation were school administrators, classroom teachers, and school practitioners.
committed to implementing policies through culturally relevant approaches for the educational enhancement of their migrant student population.

Interviews with all participants were audio-taped and transcribed. The transcripts were then shared with each individual as part of member checks for verification and accuracy. Participants were asked to review and make appropriate clarification or changes. The themes were analyzed within the context of the guiding questions and organized connecting the literature with the collected data.

Studies conducted on the educational experiences of migrant children in the U.S. illustrate an overwhelming need to develop strategies for overcoming the numerous barriers associated with the arduous lifestyle and that impede academic success (Pavri, Bentz, Bradley & Corso, 2005; Romanowski, 2003; Kozoll, Osborne & Garcia, 2003). This study contributes to the research by examining key factors in the migrant experience universally cherished within the families of my participants which are often in conflict with mainstream culture. For instance, although the literature provides plenty of evidence of teachers who are convinced that Latino parents do not value education (Valencia & Black, 2002), this study presented examples of how parents were active contributors in their children’s education through various means. They included *consejos*, providing plenty of opportunity to at home to study and complete their homework, and by reading to their children at a young age through religious oriented materials.

Another factor was social capital as portrayed within the migrant experience. Social capital is based on strong family networks (*familismo*) that are an important part of the community structure which often includes fictive kin like *compadrazco* relationships (Ebaugh, 2001; Mirande, 1977; Viramontez Anguiano, 2004). Finally, the participants provided in detail their perceptions of school culture through their interactions with school teachers and guidance
counselors. The interviews revealed that teachers never discussed college as an option after high school. Additionally, the role the guidance counselors played in the educational experiences of my participants were limited to creating course schedules at the time of enrollment and preparing their report cards and transcripts when they withdrew for another intrastate or interstate migratory move.

The above ecological factors collectively provided more implicit, yet significant aspects of the migrant experience that contributes to the research. Resiliency, for example, was common among the participants. Their skills and ability to face adversity helped them overcome many various common barriers in education (Demos, 1989; Herbert, 1996; Walsh, 2003). Resiliency in students was stronger among those with at least one parent who fit the definition of an organic intellectual. There was strong evidence that parents who demonstrated organic intellectual traits had children who were more academically advanced. One undisputed similarity between the participants was the importance put upon social networks. Without a doubt, these social networks ultimately determined the migratory pattern the migrant family established over time and followed faithfully every year. Finally, the role migrant education programs played in the K-12 experiences of my participants was crucial. The more my participants took advantage of the educational services through the migrant education programs, the higher educational attainment was gained. Therefore, this validates the importance of the migrant education program within the migrant experience.

Limitations of the Study

By focusing only on six adults who followed the migrant stream back to Northwest Ohio each year, the results can not be applied to all migrant individuals. The collective K-12 experiences and social networks of the participants outside their home states of Texas and
Florida were limited to Northwest Ohio. Additionally, I had a personal interest in this particular geographical area because it is where I returned to each year with my parents for agricultural work and to attend public school.

There was one issue that arose during the study that I did not anticipate. The nature of a life history study relies chiefly on the participants’ recollection of past experiences to respond to the series of interview questions. The list of interview questions were provided in advance to help participants recall memories within a given timeframe and specific context to facilitate the interview process. Still, there were great changes made to the transcripts during member checking as participants added more details to their responses or significantly changed their responses due to more time for reflection.

School Leadership Implications and Recommendations

Although becoming familiar with the needs of migrant children is important, it is not enough for school leaders to simply strive to for cultural competence. It is one thing for leaders to become knowledgeable of the diverse cultures that make up their community; it is another to act responsibly on this knowledge. Karim (2003) suggest that as leaders we respond with a greater moral obligation to the greater good through a concept she calls intercultural consciousness, also referred to as cultural proficiency.

Several key ecological factors were discussed in this study that are consistent with present research on topics related to the migrant experience. This section will explain the implications of the identified ecological factors on school leadership. The recommendations offered may not reflect mainstream thinking, but are necessary if significant improvements are to be made. Therefore, leaders should approach these recommendations with intercultural consciousness and a sincere moral obligation to the greater good. Although intended for school
leaders and classroom practitioners, the following recommendations are applicable to anyone working with migrant children in Northwest Ohio.

My study showed that school leaders need to recognize the need of improved collaboration with their migrant population. To do so effectively, school leaders should not only understand the cultural discontinuity that exists between the mainstream school culture and the migrant families it serves (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005), they should also value the contributions that the migrant family culture brings to the educational experience of migrant children (Cranston-Gingras & Anderson, 1990). One common misunderstanding relates to the lack of involvement migrant parents demonstrate in the educational process of their children which is a key frustration among school personnel (Jones & Vales, 1997; Ramirez, 1999). However, while migrant parents do not participate in school related events as regularly as mainstream parents, this should not be mistaken as a show of disinterest toward school or that they undervalue education. Also, most of the participants stated that schools rarely sent letters home written in the families’ home language and that bilingual interpreters were seldom provided during school meetings or teacher conferences. To facilitate open communication with parents and to increase parental involvement, schools must offer translation and interpreting services when English is not spoken in the home. At present time, language issues still exist in Ohio and are a big concern among migrant families.

Another suggestion for enhanced collaborative with migrant parents and to facilitate their active participation on school related issues is to identify leaders among the parents and solicit their input on educational issues in school and in the classroom. The parents of Sandra, Hector and Matilde exhibited organic intellectual traits consistent with their activist nature within the family and in the community (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). Incorporating their support and
active participation can have a positive affect of the education of their own children and can help to solicit the involvement of other migrant families in the community. If school leaders are sincere about developing a true district-wide collaboration with the migrant community, they must be prepared to accommodate the volume of people they will potentially attract. Migrant families travel in groups which may include extended family members and fictive kin, and children are never left behind. School sponsored meetings, for example, should include childcare services in a separate room to reduce interruptions during a meeting.

School leaders must recognize that inconsistent state graduation requirements are an impediment to the educational process (Garza, Reyes, & Trueba, 2004). Some of the participants in the study struggled to graduate on time as a result of the secondary credits they lost due to the differences in the state graduation requirements between Ohio and the home states they returned to at the end of the season. School leaders and guidance staff must remain vigilant about the course schedule they develop for their migrant students to make sure it reflects the requirements of the school where they intend to graduate. To do so, school staff must be well versed in the graduation requirements of the migrant students’ home states.

Most of the participants did not consider their guidance counselor as a resource for accessing college information. Additionally, all six of the participants maintained that their teachers never approached them about the idea of college. Except for Candelario and Matilde, none of the participants had family members they could turn to for guidance and information on higher education. It is critical for school leaders to create opportunities for migrant students to learn about college and other alternatives available after high school for inspiration to continue excelling educationally and to help them make informed choices (Cranston-Gingras & Anderson, 1990).
Finally, school administrators need to collaborate with migrant education program directors that are a valuable resource for school districts faced with the challenges of meeting the needs of their migrant student population. Through their intrastate and interstate networks, they can help a district track these students to evaluate their progress and apply the necessary resources to facilitate a positive and successful educational experience.

Recommendations for Further Research

Considering the findings of this study, an investigation into the dynamics of the compadrazgo system within the migrant community could provide valuable insight into an unseen form of kinship. Although research traditionally defines compadrazgo relationships as having a religious significance within the Latino community, the term surfaced in the interviews to describe close bonds between migrant adults that were formed out of mutual benefit. If a new form of compadrazgo exists, it would be important to understand the dynamics of this kinship as well as its significance in the migrant experience to incorporate this knowledge into policy making.

While this life history study offers a perspective into the strengths and weaknesses of public school teachers and guidance counselors from adults who were former migrant students, studies of teachers’ and guidance counselors’ perceived roles in the academic achievement of migrant students is needed. Data from both perspectives can be juxtaposed to understand ways of improving direct services and to facilitate better communication between teachers, guidance counselors and students.

Research is needed to investigate the leadership significance of individuals identified as organic intellectuals among the migrant population. Currently, no research exists relating these two specific topics. Examining their influence within migrant communities and mainstream
society could uncover a new phenomenon that many positively impact the educational outcomes of migrant students.

Finally, although Hispanics make up 89 percent of the total migrant population according to a migrant education program annual report (ED-01-CO-0033/0002, 2006) much of the general literature on Latinos is often applied to migrants. It is imperative that more research is focused specifically on the Hispanic migrant experience. Over-generalizing the research fails to identify important factors specific to sub-groups (Gándara, 1995). By grouping all Latino subgroups into one homogeneous cluster, important information is lost. People who share the same cultural realities also react differently in their daily existence because of the varied knowledge that is unique to their experiences (Tapia, 1998). More information about sub-groups is necessary to adequately respond to their development and psychological adjustment (Umaña-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002).

Conclusion

This study is a contribution to the body of literature in the area of school leadership and educational services to migrant children. The purpose of this life history study was to explore the ecological factors of six adults in Northwest Ohio who followed the migrant stream as children to understand academic success.

The study confirmed that Latino migrant parents do in fact value education even though a big segment of mainstream culture still believes otherwise. The parents mentioned in this study proved their children’s education was important even at an early age by reading materials that were often religious in nature and written in Spanish. The study also revealed however, an overwhelming reluctance for parents to access public libraries for fear of the financial consequences for lost materials. This is an issue administrators can address with parents at
school meetings if it can effectively engage its migrant community. Public libraries should consider ways of reaching out to its Latino community to confront some of the fears and myths about accessing this valuable community resource.

Responsibility is part of leadership. There needs to be accountability in developing culturally sensitive approaches to an inclusive school environment that embraces participation from all parents and incorporates the entire family. Those participants in the study who did not finish school (Lee and Juanita) were most affected by the unjust treatment they received from teachers who they believed rejected their migrant identity. Furthermore, the same two participants were the only respondents who believed that their guidance counselors had a negative impact on their education. At the same time, all but one respondent (Sandra) never experienced a conversation with their guidance counselor regarding post graduation plans. Because leadership can start anywhere in the organization, it is important that accountability is shared at the school level and that the vision is effectively communicated and understood to incorporate lasting change for the betterment of all migrant children.
REFERENCES


