

Western Oregon University

Digital Commons@WOU

Student Theses, Papers and Projects (History)

Department of History

5-29-2002

Life Experiences of Mexican and Mexican-American Students: Migrant Education Program, Salem/Keizer School District

Anna I. Munoz

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/his>



Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), and the [Social History Commons](#)

**Life Experiences of Mexican and Mexican-American Students:
Migrant Education Program,
Salem/Keizer School District**

By: Anna I. Munoz

Senior Seminar HST 499w

Dr. Sil

May 29, 2002

I

The American education system was created as a free, public and compulsory system. Its main purpose was to offer equal educational opportunities to all children, but in the process many children were been left out. One particular group of students are the migrant farm workers, the Mexican and Mexican-American high school students. These students are in serious needs for programs and educators that can provide them with the necessary academic and social services. As the growth of Mexican and Mexican-American student became noticeable in the school districts a revision in the education system was needed to accommodate these and other migrant students with the adequate educational services.

In June, 1951, a conference was held at the Office of Education, Federal Security Agency, Washington D.C. for the purpose of discussing the nature, extent and seriousness of education problems within the migrant groups. In that conference, it was revealed the main problems which are unique to the education of migrant children. "The handicaps imposed by migration to work in agriculture, the difficulties in local school districts in finding school facilities and teachers for large numbers of migrant children for short periods each year, and the limitation for financial support."¹ Those factors are the main contributors to the difficulties of the education experienced by migrant students. But that is not the end of the line, there are other social barriers that also contribute to the barriers of their education, such as, poverty, discrimination and segregation from the rest of the community.

Education starts at home, but for Mexican and Mexican-American high school students there is no stable home where education can be influenced or introduced. The majority of these student's parents have no education at all, some of them have the minimal three to four years of early elementary education. Parental support is

¹ Federal Security Agent Office of Education, "The Education of Children of Migrant Agricultural Workers," Digest of Four Regional Conferences (Washington 25, D.C.: U.S. Federal Security Agency, Office of Education, 1952), i.

usually minimal. When Mexican migrant children migrate to the United States with their parents, they bring with them the aspirations of wanting to be educated

The Migrant Education Program from the Salem/Keizer School District has been dedicated to the effort of providing a successful education experience to all migrant students. The Migrant Education Program is working very hard on providing the necessary services for High School students, one major efforts is promoting parent involvement in their children's education experience.

II

The migratory stream of the Western seaboard, which originates in California and moves up north to Oregon and Washington, is made up of mostly Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. Many find work harvesting seasonal crops that require manual labor, and wherever it is required migrant workers along with their children move there. While migrant workers have limited job options, their children qualify for the Migrant Education Program as long as they work in any kind of agriculture related job. Mexican migrants who migrate to Oregon usually come from Michoacan, Zacatecas, Jalisco, and Guanajuato. They follow the crops depending on the season and the availability of work. As Richard W. Slatta observes in his study of Oregon's Hispanic population "Hispanic population tended to cluster along agricultural corridors like the Willamette Valley in western Oregon, where jobs were plentiful."² In recent years migrant families have expanded all over the state of Oregon.

Mexican families have been migrating to Oregon for many years, "They were miners in the Rogue River Valley, railroad workers and cowboys and descendants of the 16th Century explorers."³ But after World War II the migration percentage grew.

One of the main reasons for that increase was because many Mexicans were coming

² Richard W. Slatta, "Hispanics in Oregon: A Demographic Profile," in Erasmo Gamboa and Carolyn M. Buan, ed., Nosotros: The Hispanic People of Oregon. (Portland: Oregon Council for the Humanities, 1995), 8.

³ Gary Hargett, "Educational Reform and Its Effect on Migrant Education: A Position Paper," Migrant Education Service Center (Salem: State Department of Education, 1995), 3.

to replace the temporary farm workers (Braceros) that were hired and brought from Mexico to aid in the need for farm labor during the war. The Braceros were not considered migrant workers, because to get them to the U.S., a process was developed by an agreement between government officials from both Mexico and the United States. They were hired under contract directly from Mexico as temporary workers. Once that contract expired, they were returned back to Mexico. In Gamboa's study on the Bracero Program, "In Oregon and throughout the Pacific Northwest, the Bracero labor force had been a decisive factor in the state's ability to sustain critical agriculture production and the Mexican men therefore had played a significant role in winning the war."⁴ The Bracero program began in 1942 and lasted until the end of the war in 1947. But the importation of Mexican workers continued among individual growers and farmers. Later in the early 1950s, the Bracero program was renewed to assist again in the shortage of agriculture laborers during the Korean conflict.

The Bracero program was extended until 1964.

The return of the Braceros to Mexico opened up many opportunities for those other Mexicans who wanted to migrate to the United States with the intentions of taking up on those left behind agriculture jobs. Traditionally, it has been the attraction of steady employment that has guided Mexicans to come to America. Not many of them made the journey north with the intention of becoming permanent residents or to seek U.S. citizenship. Their economic situation in Mexico was the number one reason why many Mexican families were forced to look for other alternatives to their difficult situation. Eventually, adventurous immigrant families and single men extended out across the United States from border to border and sea to sea. Most of them intended to return home after they had accumulated a dependable financial savings. The passage of time and acculturation to the "American way," however, dimmed their original intentions.

⁴ Erasmo Gamboa and Carolyn M. Buan, ed., Nosotros The Hispanic People of Oregon (Portland: Oregon Council for the Humanities, 1995), 41.

Many Mexican migrant families live in rural areas back home in the midst of poverty, hunger, and health risks. They lack the basic services such as electricity, sewer system, and clean water in many regions, even to this day, in many rural areas of Mexico. In most cases, a desire to migrate to “el Norte” is influenced by the reports from friends and relatives of the prospective migrants who already settled in the United States. The great stories of prosperity and success in the U.S. inspired new families to make such decision, to migrate north. Of course, they never hear about the horrible reality of what is like to migrate north. But even if they did heard about that reality, many men are still willing to take their chances along with their families.

Many families who reside in Mexico prefer to move into larger Mexican cities rather than migrate to the United States, but those options depend on whether they have families or friends who are stable there. Opportunities are not presented unless the families move into the inner-cities, but that decision is just as drastic as migrating to the United States. The violent crimes, and the poverty of larger Mexican cities intimidates them and discourages them from making that decision. Of course, the reality is that they face the same challenges when they migrate to the United States. But the fact that earning dollars is worth more than pesos is an important and unique attraction to migrate to the U.S.

Another major motivations for Mexican families to migrate north to the United States is wanting a better future for them and their children. Many Mexican parents practice old traditions, but when they look ahead, they do not want their children to suffer the same misery they have. The only way to break the cycle of poverty and the lack of education opportunities is by taking chances and sacrificing many comforts in their own country for the future prosperity of their children.

Once in the United States, “some workers...migrate great distances in search of employment; others are unwilling to go beyond commuting distances because of the cost of transportation, lack of adequate housing, low wages, absence of education,

health and other community facilities for their families.”⁵ As whole families follow in the journey of migrating, they do not always end up on the same agriculture fields. That also means that the children do not enroll in the same school in each area every year. Annually, the parents might move within the same state, even within the same county, but they work for a different grower and live in a different community.

III

With frequent moves, the migrant students are the ones who end up suffering the consequences of migratory work as they have no other options but to move along with their parents. They have no permanent homes, they are poorly clothed, and malnourished. They have no social or geographical roots, they endure the feeling of being left out, and they lack basic educational skills. It is very difficult to provide them with the proper education when they are constantly moving from place to place. Education for Mexican migrant children is very important to make a satisfactory and productive living.

The Migrant Education Program was established for migrant students and their families to help aid those kind of problems. The program was created after Congress included language in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965, to help the children of migrant farm workers. But, the program became stronger after it was reauthorized for the last time in 1994 and amended by the Improving America's Schools Act-Public Law 103-382. “The purpose of the reauthorized ESEA is to improve teaching and learning for all students, including migrant students, to enable them to meet challenging academic content and student performance standards.”⁶ Since then, migrant education projects have been established throughout the U.S.

The Migrant Education Program serves at least twenty five school districts throughout Oregon. Before offering services to any school district certain

⁵ Federal Security Agent Office of Education, “The Education of Children,” 1.

⁶ Oregon Department Of Education, Handbook for Directors of Migrant Education Projects (Salem: Oregon Department of Education Office of Compensatory Education, 1997), 1.

requirements need to be met, such as the ones reported in a study about "The Migrant Education Program," by Ronald G. Petrie in 1962, "The approach to Migrant Education varies from district to district depending upon local conditions, facilities available, type of migrant (Anglo or Spanish--speaking), length of the harvest season, and attitude of the community."⁷ Currently, the requirements to serve school districts have changed slightly adding additional factors.

The program is currently serving Hispanic migrant children which represent 93.7% of the population in the program, making it the largest group of participants in Oregon. Marion County, for example, has grown to become one of the most populated counties with migrant families. In the Salem/Keizer School District alone, there were about 3,500 migrant students enrolled in 1999-2000 school year. Off that figure, 800 students were enrolled in High School. Those figures change frequently throughout the school year, caused by the constant enrollment and withdraws of migrant children. "The program is a federal funded National program that provides supplemental educational services to more than 800,000 eligible migrant children (Nation wide) to help them overcome educational disruptions and disadvantages."⁸ Funds for the program are estimated according to the migrant student population, the needs, and resources of the students.

There are many benefits offered to the student as well as for the parents by the Migrant Education Program. The number one benefit introduced during the recruiting process is the accident insurance. It is offered to school age students free of charge and it protects them from any kind of accident they were to have within Oregon boundaries. This is sure a benefit the majority of Mexican families do not have as a coverage in Mexico. The migrant program also provides the parents with information about social services within the community which can be beneficial in case they were

⁷ Ronald G. Petrie, The Education of Migrant Children in Oregon (Salem: State Department of Education, 1962), 1.

⁸ Anedelia Vasquez, "Hispanic Migrant Students, The Early Leavers" (B.A. Senior Research Project, George Fox University, 1997), 6.

to need them. The migrant specialists in some cases serve as a connection and interprets between those community agencies and the school staff. But most important are the academic services for the migrant students.

Migrant students are targeted once they enroll in a school that is served by the Migrant Program. They are identified by a migrant specialist who constantly supervises the new student's enrollment in that school. "To qualify for the program, a migrant child must have moved within the past three years across state or school district lines with a migrant parent, guardian, spouse, or a member of the child's immediate family to obtain temporary or seasonal employment in agricultural or fishing activities."⁹ Once the child and the qualifying members of the family are recruited into the program they can immediately begin to take advantage of the services provided by the Migrant Program. The program is design to serve the students for three years, but they can re-qualify as long as they or their parents continue relocating and working in agriculture. The program also stops serving migrant students who reach the age of twenty one or complete a High School Diploma or a General Education Degree (GED).

IV

Migrant children along with their families tend to settle in rural areas isolated from the rest of the community. In some cases they are hard to reach by school officials or by migrant program recruiters. Their housing consist of anything that can be called a shelter, such as mobile houses, trailers, shacks, farm houses, or apartment under the worse conditions. They usually lack the fundamental needs for a decent living, such as, electricity, tap water, sewer and sanitation facilities. They do not have the means to have a well furnished home. They only have the necessary elements, since their stay is only temporary. Beside, is tough enough to be moving around many

⁹ Oregon Migrant Education Program, Identification & Recruitment Manual: Pamphlet (Salem: Migrant Education Service Center, 1998), 2.

times a year, it would be even tougher if they had to carry with them heavy furniture and appliances.

Home is an endless series of brief habitations in poorly equipped houses and temporary accommodations. The most common living provided are found in the labor camps, which furnish housing units. Some camps are provided by the grower on his own property for his own labor force, others are privately owned and rented for profit, while others may be owned and operated by farmer groups or organizations. The number of farm workers in need of housing exceeds the number of available housing units. In a study on social economic conditions of migrant families conducted by Gerardo R. Lopez and others "*Windows/Ventanas: A postmodern re-presentation of children in migrancy*" he emphasizes on the issues of the cost of housing and health among migrant workers, "Small rural communities may not have enough rental units available, or they may be unavailable to migrant farm workers because they cannot provide deposits, qualify in credit checks, or make longer-term rental commitments."¹⁰

In the Marion County area there have been many housing project developed for farm workers such as "Nuevo Amanecer" in Woodburn. These housing projects were developed by Farm worker Housing Development Corp. "The nonprofit organization was established to help provide affordable housing to the estimated 2,500-plus Marion County farm workers living under bridges and in their cars, Farm worker Housing Development Corp is the developer of Woodburn's Nuevo Amanecer Apartments."¹¹

The experience of confronting a different environment and different living conditions in the United States compared to the way some migrant students lived in Mexico can be overwhelming. In many cases, migrant families own their houses in Mexico. Those houses may not have all the right furniture and appliances, but

Mexicans manage to make them themselves from clay or scraps of metals and woods.

¹⁰ Gerardo R. Lopex, [sic], et al, "Windows/Ventanas: A Postmodern Re-presentation of Children in Migrancy," Educational Administration Quarterly 34 (August, 1998): 409.

¹¹ Daniel P. Santos, "Improving the Lot of Migrant Farm Laborers: National and State Legislative Reforms of the 1980s," in Erasmo Gamboa and Carolyn M. Buan, ed., Nosotros The Hispanic People of Oregon. (Portland: Oregon Council for the Humanities, 1995), 68.

Mexican people enjoy the freedom of owning their home in Mexico, and for them, that is enough comfort.

Migrant families are usually considered to be large, compared to the traditional American family. But that is not the case, many modern migrant families have been reduced to two or up to four children the most. The reason for that change is because many young families are migrating earlier than their ancestors, without any children. In some cases, those children who come from large families grow up not wanting to experience the difficulties of caring for too many children. The children of migrant workers come to realize that progress is not based on having too many children. Progress to them is based on working hard and to be educated.

Migrant children suffer negligence and abandonment from their parent because they work long hours. Many migrant parents do not find the time to get involved in their children's education. Others do not care to get involved because they prefer that their children work and not waste their time in going to school. Those migrant students are the ones who are most likely to become influenced by outside delinquency from other youngsters. The kind of problems attracted when migrant children are left home alone are; illegal drug abuse, alcohol abuse, integration to gangs, sexual and physical abuse, excessive tardiness and absences from school and bad nutrition habits.

There are migrant parent who are very concern about their children's education, and they make every effort to at least attend the school's monthly parent meetings. Even though, they work many hours during the day they always manage to make time for their children. In many studies conducted to the general student population it has been proven that the more the parents become involved in their children's education, the more successful the students become in their academic performances.

Regarding health problems among migrant farm workers and the students, Lopez expresses, "Unsanitary working and housing conditions make farm workers vulnerable to health conditions no longer considered to be threats to the general

public.”¹² Migrant students are more likely to be affected by handicapping conditions because of poverty and multiple health problems. It is very important for school to be aware of the health problems, if any, of each migrant student. Migrant Students Record Transfer System (MSRTS) is used to find all the information regarding migrant students. As is reported on a MSRTS report, “Because it is design to provide technically specific information on immunizations and chronic and acute health problems, the MSRTS health record should be updated primarily by trained health providers.”¹³ The only problem with MSRTS is that teacher do not take the necessary time to review the records. “Although local educators have rejected MSRTS student records partially because of their inaccuracy, administrators continue to use these records as the basis for producing management reports.”¹⁴

The processed used to transferred MSRTS records to the new schools was by mail. By the time the records reached the new school, the student had already transferred again. That process caused many records to be misplaced. Currently the process to transfer those records has become easier, for example, through student enrollment cards, and cards with memory or computer diskettes. Now MSRTS records follow migrant students where ever they go.

V

Many Mexican and Mexican-American migrant high school students do not attend school as they move from place to place. Some times the wait takes weeks and even months before they begin to attend school. For the majority of the migrant students, the first day of classes is the toughest to confront. Many of them prefer to start school after the agriculture season in which they are currently working, or until the beginning of the next school year. For many migrant students school is a place to

¹² Lopez, *Windows/Ventanas*. 405.

¹³ National Commission on Migrant Education, *Keeping up With Our National's Migrant Students: A Report on the Migrant Student Record Transfer System MSRTS* (Bethesda: National Commission on Migrant Education, 1991), 6. Here after cited as MSRTS.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

receive love, stability, health care, and often the best meal of the day. So the feeling of belonging, that teachers can help, and that they can learn in a new school are issues of great importance to the migrant students.

There are many reasons why migrant students do not attend school right away. The parents of high school students prefer that they stay home and work instead. A job and the needs to secure food and housing dominate their decision. In many cases, they have younger siblings whose mother can not take care of them because she works all day, therefore, the older brother or sister is obligated to stay home to baby-sit. Furthermore, the student realizes that their economic situation does not provide them with their school expenses. Often, migrant students want to take a break from school, because they are exhausted from moving around from school to school and dealing with different school personnel.

James Day's study on Migrant Education, covers other issues such as safety needs in the new school environment for the migrant student, "When he enters the new school it may be perceived as very different and threatening."¹⁵ Socially and emotionally, moving creates varying degrees of stress which, in turn, are manifested in adjusting to a new school. The frequent changing of schools can become very confusing and devastated for the students since the transition can be consider as a new starting point. Day goes on saying about the effects on migrant students when they attend different schools and how teachers should adjust to their needs, "Let all teachers remember that the child's main incentive for learning and assuming proper behavior patterns lies in the satisfaction of his basic needs, especially his needs for belong, love and favorable emotional response from significant others."¹⁶

Many schools especially those in rural areas, where migrant students are mostly found, do not provide the necessary programs to full fill migrant children's academic needs. In those cases, the adaptation process can become intimidating for

¹⁵ James F. Day, Migrant Education (New York: Philosophical Library, 1975), 13.

¹⁶ Day, Migrant Education, 14-15.

the student and it can also lead to discouragement from attending school. To feel part of the school system is a great remedy for students to attend school. As is explain by Elizabeth Sutton in her study on how to teach migrant children, "The job of working with migrant children in the schools, as seen against a background of their life and the problem it creates, requires careful preparation before teaching is even begun."¹⁷

VI

The Salem/Keizer School District is currently working very hard on the implementation of the Migrant Education Program as part of an essential alternative to serve the new comers and the ongoing migrant students. There are six High Schools in the district in which the Migrant Program offer services. In addition, the program also serves in the Teen Parent Center and in the Alternative Chemeketa Community College GED Center. At the beginning of the 2001-2002 school year, the total of high school migrant student in the Salem/Keizer School District was 500 students. The school is in the process of expanding, adding a new high school in the fall of 2002 which is being build in West Salem.

The number one benefit that the Migrant Program offers and the one that attracts the families to the program is the accident insurance. As mentioned before the accident insurance covers only accidents and not illnesses. Many parents can be pessimistic thinking that their children are not likely to get into an accident, therefore, the insurance does not apply to them. But the reality is that anybody is at risk of having any kind of accident. For example, students who participate in sports are at risk of suffering an accident regardless of the type of sport they practice. Another place of frequent accidents is out in the agriculture fields during work hours. "Accidents are most common in agricultural work and compounded with the intensive labor, often in

¹⁷ Elizabeth Sutton, Knowing and Teaching the Migrant Child (Washington D.C.: Department of Rural Education of the National Education Association, 1960), 35.

extreme weather conditions, required of migrant farm workers.”¹⁸ Many migrant children work during the summer along with their parents or in other places, and because the job is temporary no benefits are offered to them by the employer.

The plan to educate the migrant child must be pointed towards permanent intentions, not temporary or emergency measures. Language barriers and cultural differences should not be an excuse for denying migrant students appropriate educational services. But the reality is often different, for example, one migrant student expresses her frustrations in Beth Atkin's *Voices From the Fields*, “A lot of the times the teachers don't help that much--they say they are busy with another student or something. They don't understand.”¹⁹ According to the equal Opportunities Act, every child has the right to attend school. Migrancy imposes unique difficulties upon migrant students, but these difficulties should not deprive them from an education.

The kind of language barriers students confront are found in those students who do not speak any English at all. There are some Mexican migrant students who come from the southern regions of Mexico and who speak indigenous languages instead of or in addition to Spanish. Those migrant students have double the difficulties in their classrooms in trying to learn English. English as a Second Language (ESL) is integrated in the lesson plans for Migrant children. “The great majority of migrant students are members of linguistic minorities; in Oregon, over 80% have Spanish as a heritage language, and for many, English is a second language.”²⁰ Without ESL students would not have a chance to feel integrated into the school system and the struggles would be greater in wanting to communicate with teachers and fellow students. “Even those whose dominant language is English often lack a full range of English proficiency because another language is spoken in the home or community; they have limited exposure to rich language modeling, and too often, they are placed

¹⁸ Mary Henning-Stout, “Que Podemos Hacer?: Roles for School Psychologists With Mexican and Latino Migrant Children and Families,” *School Psychology Review* 25 (1996): 156.

¹⁹ S. Beth Atkin, *Voices From The Fields: Children of Migrant Farmworkers Tell Their Stories* (Little Brown and Co., 1993), 23.

²⁰ Hargett, “Educational Reform,” 3.

in compensatory programs that reduce rather than enrich the opportunity to use language”²¹

VII

The Migrant Education Program was designed to encourage bilingual and bicultural development among Mexican and Mexican-American students as well as student from other countries. The student’s parents are encourage to join in and learn with their children about bilingual and bicultural issues and measures in the education system. There is actually a Parental and Community Participation Policy (ORS 329.125) established by the State Board of Education, “The Legislative Assembly recognizes that(1)School districts provide opportunities for parents and guardians to be involved in establishing and implementing educational goals and to participate in decision making at the school site.”²²

The Migrant Education Program is doing a very good job by keeping up in the effort to develop programs and activities for parents to participate. Migrant specialist begin by gaining a healthy relationship with the parents that consist of trust, and confidence. It is very important that both the parent and the migrant specialist collaborate close together in the effort of the educational success of the migrant students. “This process is very important since the student’s home life plays a critical role in the success which the student will have in school and in later life.”²³

Some examples of the activities coordinated by the Migrant Program are parent meetings conducted only in Spanish for those migrant parents who do not understand English. The issues covered in the meetings range from local school issues, district issues, issues in the migrant program, and state and government issues. For the purpose of the meetings transportation, and child care are provided. The Migrant Program sometimes distributes to the parents winter coats for the children, educational

²¹ Ibid.

²² Oregon Department of Education, Handbook, 57.

²³ Oregon Migrant Education Program, Identification & Recruitment Manual, 86.

books in Spanish and English, school supplies and other goodies that are useful for the migrant students. Workshops, inservices, and conferences are also other forms to motivate and inform parents about the importance of their involvement in their children's education.

The Migrant Program provides in-class and after school tutoring sessions for migrant student who are at risk of failing one or more classes. The tutoring sessions are organized with teachers and counselors based on the needs expressed in the student progress reports. The assigned migrant specialist of the high schools constantly checks the progress of each migrant student. The in-class tutoring is arranged with the teachers permission and depending of the amount of students in the class room. Because migrant students are scattered in different classes, is better to serve in classrooms where most of the students are found. The in-class tutoring consist of the migrant specialist to be assigned to a small group of students to assist them on a class assignment or project, usually the same as the rest of the class.

The students' needs are not limited to academic problems. Even if the student is doing very well in each class subject, the migrant specialist has the obligation to check with the students at least once each semester in case there might be other social or health needs. For example, if the student is suffering from a tooth ache and needs to see a dentist, a cost that the parents can not afford and that the accident insurance does not cover, then the migrant program refers the student to a dentist. The Migrant program accounts with extra funds for the students to cover emergency expenses to see a dentist, an optometrist, and even a psychologist. Situations where a student needs glasses or needs to see a dentist can be a factor for excessive absences from school. But the absence issues are more drastic then the need for glasses. Migrant students are more likely to be absent from school than any other student.

The migrant program also encourages the migrant students to get involved in

school clubs, academic programs and student conferences and workshops. In some cases there is fees involved for the students to participate, but the migrant program accounts with extra funds to cover those charges. The migrant program has organized to assist migrant high school students to attend conferences such as the Cesar Chavez Conference, Voces de la Raza, Multicultural Conference, MECHA and other Chicano Conferences.

The graduation rate among Mexican and Mexican-American migrant students is usually the lowest compared to that of the Anglo migrant students and of any population group in the public schools. The comparative rate at which they are able to complete post secondary education is even lower. Many High School migrant students are unaware of the graduation requirements and the opportunities available for higher education. That in part has to do with the frequent mobility and the low levels of English language skills, but they also face economic, cultural, and social discrimination. As reported by Patrick Belton in the article *The Children Who Pick Our Grapes*, Janie Flores a former migrant child who is now a professional currently helping out other migrant students to work their way out of the fields and into education. Flores's mission is to promote parents to get involve in their children's education, "Nevertheless, she observes that once parents become familiar with the way in which the school systems work and with the options that exist for higher education, the availability of loans and scholarships, and precisely what their children would have to do to gain admission to a junior college, community college, and university, then the overwhelming majority of the parents emerge as ardent supporters of their children's education."²⁴ But there is no doubt that as long as migrant student are constantly moving from place to place their education will always be affected negatively. In a study of Migrant Education by Shirley E. Greene, she concludes, "Frequent uprooting and moving from community to community and from school to school with consequent interruptions and readjustments simply do not

²⁴ Patrick Belton, "The Children Who Pick Our Grapes," Peace Review 12, no. 3 (2000): 465.

provide the conditions necessary for a satisfactory education experience, either in the limited technical sense of subject matter learning or in the broader social sense of preparation for learning in a democracy."²⁵

The Migrant Education Program collaborates with the Salem/Keizer School District assisting all migrant High School students to meet the requirements to satisfy the High School Equivalent Program (HEP). The Migrant Program collaborate with the local Chemeketa Community College to assist those students who can not attend traditional High School to complete a General Education Diploma (GED). The Migrant Education also offers a Summer school session for those High School students who are lacking credits for graduation.

The Summer session as it is described in the migrant education manual, "It includes summer activities to supplement regular school year instruction with the necessary teacher assistance and instructional materials."²⁶ The Summer session is limited to a certain amount of students, so only those who are at high risk of failing their classes, those who have limited English skills and those who are behind on their academic level are prioritize.

VIII

Migrant children assume family responsibilities much earlier and to a greater extent than the average child. One of those responsibilities is working in the fields or other agricultural related jobs to improve the family's economic status. The Oregon law for child labor allows students to work under strict measures, but those measures apply differently to those under age children who work in agriculture fields. Migrant students risk their health and their education when they work at an early age.

²⁵ Shirley E. Greene, The Education of Migrant Children: A Study of the Education Opportunities and Experiences of the Children of Agricultural Migrants. (Washington D.C.: Department of Rural Education of the National Education Association of the United States, 1954), 74-75.

²⁶ Oregon Migrant Education Program, Identification Manual, 8.

Elizabeth Sutton interviewed many migrant children, and she found that migrant children are aware of their economic needs at an early age. As she observes, "Early in life the children have a concern for money and feel responsible for helping to support their families and for making their own way."²⁷ In many cases, migrant students manage to work only during the summer when they are off from school, others are forced to work in between school sessions causing them to sacrifice their education. Many of them work after school, on Saturdays, and holidays seasons. The work consists of agriculture jobs or doing other odd jobs. Students who follow that trend, tend to skip school to work other manage very well their education and work responsibilities.

The Salem/Keizer Migrant Education Program currently employs high school students for after school and during the week hours. The students perform clerical work at the Student Services Office where the migrant office is located. The Oregon guidelines to employs students are, "Minors may not be required to lift any weight which is too great for the individual, no driving on public roads under 17 years, 17 year olds only with restrictions, HO#2, 14-15 # HS/SCH day (After School), 8 HRS. on WKNDS-7 AM-7 PM, 18 HRS total per week."²⁸ However, the regulations to employ minors on the field fall under different guidelines. In Lopez findings, "Even without parent consent, 10 and 11-year-old migrant farm worker children can be used as hand-harvesters if the employer gets a waiver from the Departments of Labor."²⁹

The migrant students can either do seasonal or temporary agriculture work. As stated in the migrant education manual, agriculture work is defined as, "Any activity directly related to the production or processing of crops, dairy products, poultry or livestock for initial commercial sale or as a primary means of personal

²⁷ Elizabeth Sutton, Knowing and Teaching the Migrant Child (Washington D.C.: Department of Rural Education of the National Education Association, 1960), 19.

²⁸ Jack Roberts, Salem/Keizer Public Schools -44 (Salem: Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries, 2001), 1.

²⁹ Lopez, Windows/Ventanas, 406.

subsistence.”³⁰ The crops that attract migrant worker to the Salem/Keizer area include the vegetables: broccoli, cauliflower, onions, corn cucumbers; the fruits: cherries, strawberries, peaches and other berries; Christmas trees; hops, and many other crops.

Most farm workers earn annual incomes below the federal poverty levels. Migrant students earn the same wages as their parents but in most cases, they do not get to keep any of it because all goes to their parents. There are other cases where the parent let their children keep some or most of their earnings depending on how responsible the child is with money.

Migrant students as well as their parents are exposed to many dangers working in agriculture. They work long hours under harsh weather and in awkward and tiring positions. Even though there are regulations to follow when employing a minor, they are usually ignored. Some of those dangers consist of dealing with heavy machinery, toxic fertilizers, and poor sanitary conditions. Others are mentioned by Atkin, “By coming in contact with the crops that have been sprayed with pesticides as well as with pesticides that drift from nearby fields and from spraying planes, field workers are exposed to hazardous chemicals and risk developing acute skin and eye problems, chronic headaches, and cancer.”³¹

Frequent absences from school usually relate to illnesses from pesticides, and to see a doctor is not the first option. Atkin reflect a student’s case, “But some times it is hard and I’m tired in school on Mondays because I worked on the weekend--I also get a lot of bad headaches, so sometimes I have to leave school early or go rest in the nurse’s office--it was hard to study when I got home because I was tired.”³² The migrant program can sometimes assist with coverage for severed illnesses if fund are available, but the major coverage is the accident insurance. Mexican migrant families relate to traditional herbal medicines that have been past on for many generations.

Another tradition is religion, Catholicism is the dominant religion in Mexico and many

³⁰ Oregon Migrant Education Program, Identification & Recruitment Manual, 11.

³¹ Atkin, Voices from the Fields, 11.

³² Ibid., 15.

families are very faithful. When a family member gets ill, they pray and hope for their health to God and their saints.

IX

Social conflicts among Mexican and Mexican-American migrant students and their families are present in their neighborhoods, schools, social services agencies, grocery stores, post office and any other facility they need to approach for services. Discrimination, prejudices, segregation and the adaptation to a new culture are just few of the barriers that migrant students need to overcome to survive in the adopting society. As Sutton points out, "Wherever they go, they are temporary and unaccepted residents, rejected by regular members of communities and by personnel of schools and social or welfare agencies who are unaware of or insensitive to the circumstances which lead to deviations from accepted patterns of behavior."³³

For Mexican and Mexican-American migrant student social conflict issues affect their already interrupted education process. Without the parent knowing the basics of English communication, it is their children who are forced to learn as quickly as possible. It is the students who are used as translator by their parents in any place where there is no Spanish speaking personnel. That process can be frustrated for the students, the parents, and as well as for the person who is been translated too. In many cases services are denied to the migrant family because of lack of communication or misunderstandings. There are other times when migrant families bump into intolerant people who just do not want to be bother with.

In today's society migrant families should find it possible to satisfy their basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, and health, and should find it possible to have the advantages of basic education. Unfortunately, migrant families have many barriers to cross before they can be acknowledge by any government, housing or health representatives.

³³ Sutton, Knowing and Teaching the Migrant Child, 23-24.

X

The migrant education program is nevertheless progressing in keeping up with the migrant students who come and go to the Salem/Keizer School District. It is clearly that migrant students are vulnerable to under education and dropping out of school. But with migrant program academic services and the motivation from migrant specialist migrant students will feel more at ease and encouraged to succeed in their education experience. Migrant families lives are not going to change substantially; families will still need to move to find better economic situations. What educators do in general, however, could have a profound effect on migrant students' education.

Mexican families took the risk of migrating with their families to the United States in search of prosperity and successes. Those risk are proof of the willingness migrant children are to work hard and at the same time obtain an education. As G.J. Manaster found in a study of migrant students success, "We surmised that a more stable and secure successful group of migrant students would tend to consider taking risks in order to seek better, more fulfilling jobs, that is, they would have higher occupational aspirations and expectations."³⁴ Understanding migrant family lives and communicating with parents is a first step. Knowledge about the culture and values of migrant families can help educators facilitate migrant students' learning.

³⁴ G.J. Manaster and J.C. Chan, "Mexican-American Migrant Students' academic Success: Sociological and Psychological Acculturation," *Adolescence* 27 (Spring, 1992): 126.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Flores, Merced. *Dropout Factors Among Migrant Students from Six Marion County High Schools: Research Report*, Salem: State Department of Education, 1981.
- Gouwens, Judith A. *Contemporary Education Issues: Migrant Education; a Reference Handbook*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2001.
- Greene, Shirley E. *The Education of Migrant Children; A Study of the Education Opportunities and Experiences of the Children of Agricultural Migrants*. Washington D.C., Department of Rural Education of the National Education Association of the United States, 1954.
- Hargett, Gary. "Educational Reform and Its Effect on Migrant Education: A Position Paper." *Migrant Education Service Center*. Salem: State Department of Education, 1995.
- National Commission on Migrant Education. *Keeping Up With Our Nation's Migrant Student; A Report on the Migrant Student Record Transfer System (MSRTS)*, Bethesda: National Commission on Migrant Education, 1991.
- Oregon Department of Education. *Handbook of Migrant Education Projects: Title 1-C Migrant Education; Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Act*. Salem: Oregon Department of Education, Office of Compensatory Education, Spring 1997.
- Oregon Migrant Education Program. *Identification & Recruitment Manual*. Salem: Migrant Education Service Center, 1998.
- Petrie, Ronald G. "The Education of Migrant Children in Oregon." Salem: State Department of Education, 1962.
- Sutton, Elizabeth. *Knowing and Teaching the Migrant Child*. Washington D.C.: Department of Rural Education of the National Education Association, 1960.
- U.S. General Accounting Office. "Elementary School Children; Many Change Schools Frequently Harming Their Education." *Report to the Honorable Marcy Kaptur, House of Representatives*, Washington D.C.: General Accounting Office, 1994.
- Vasquez, Anedelia. "Hispanic Migrant Students, The Early Leavers." B.A. Senior Research Project, George Fox University, 1997.

Articles

- Belton, Patrick. "The Children Who Pick Our Grapes," *Peace Review* 12:3 (2000): 463-466.
- Henning-Stout, Mary. "Que Podemos Hacer?: Roles for school Psychologists with Mexican and Latino Migrant Children and Families," *School Psychology Review* 25 (1996): 152-164.
- Lopez, Gerardo R., et al. "Widows/Ventanas: A Postmodern Re-presentation of Children in Migracy," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 34 (August, 1998): 397-418.
- Manaster, G.J. and J.C. Chan. "Mexican-American Migrant Students' academic Success: Sociological and Psychological Acculturation," *Adolescence* 27 (Spring, 1992): 124-138.
- Platt, John S., and Ann Cranston-Gingras. "Understanding and educating Migrant Students," *Preventing School Failure* 36 (Fall, 1991): 41-47.

Books

- Atkin, S. Beth. *Voices from the Fields: Children of Migrant Farmworkers Tell Their Stories*. Canada: Little Brown and Co., 1993.
- Day, James F. *Migrant Education*. University of Texas at El Paso: Philosophical Library, 1975.
- Gamboa, Erasmo and Carolyn M. Buan, ed. *Nosotros; The Hispanic People of Oregon* Portland: The Oregon Council for the Humanities, 1995.