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ABSTRACT

Migrant farmworkers are the most disadvantaged of minority groups, but their needs and problems go unnoticed and unmet in most communities. Mobility, language and cultural differences, and health and nutrition problems combine to produce negative effects on school achievement. An estimated 70 percent of adult migrants have not completed high school. Although migrant farmworkers include many ethnic groups, they share a certain life style and many behavioral patterns. Migrancy as a culture tends to produce similarities in sex role expectations, roles of adults and children, dealings with social institutions, feelings of powerlessness, and attitudes toward authority. These cultural traits have implications for the success of adult education programs. Following the failure of a residential program for migrant school dropouts, the University of Tennessee established high school equivalency (UT-HEP) programs at four sites with high concentrations of migrant farmworkers in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee. This outreach program has surpassed its enrollment target each year and attracted both recent dropouts and adults. Program success is attributed to student empowerment, accessibility, flexibility of class schedules, culturally and ethnically congruent recruiters and staff, availability of bilingual counseling, individualized plans, and ongoing assessment. Several UT-HEP graduates in western North Carolina helped found a migrant community center that provides legal assistance, housing assistance, literacy education, and cultural activities as well as improving relations between migrants and the larger community. (SV)

Chapter 18
MIGRANT & SEASONAL FARMWORKERS: AN INVISIBLE POPULATION

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IN SEARCH OF INFORMATION ON MIGRANTS

Migrant farmworkers have been labeled the most disadvantaged of all minority groups. By definition, they are people on the move with little time to establish community ties; they live in isolation even when they live in high density areas;[1] and when they stop to work in local farms, they are hardly noticed by most community members. For the most part, migrant farmworkers' needs, problems, dreams and aspirations are kept hidden and go unmet and unfulfilled.

Migrants are the most undereducated major sub-group in the United States. Their high school dropout rate is higher than any other group, 43 % according to the National Council of La Raza.[2] Mobility, language and cultural differences combined with health and nutrition problems do have a negative effect on school achievement. The constant interruption of the educational process, as well as the inability of schools to understand their culture and meet their needs, leads to confusion, frustration and a feeling of alienation among migrants. Hodgkinson[3] reports that over 70 % of all migrants have not completed high school and 75 % are functionally illiterate.

Migrant agricultural labourers who travel within the geographical boundaries of the continental United States and Canada move along identifiable streams: the Eastern stream, the Mid-Continent stream, and the West Coast stream.[4] The Eastern stream is made up of Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, Anglos, Canadian Indians, and Blacks and flows up and down the region east of the Appalachian Mountains. The Mid-Continent stream,

composed of Mexicans, Mexican-Americans, Blacks, and most recently Vietnamese and Cambodians, traces the Mississipi river basin. These migrants move in all directions to and from different regions in Texas. The West Coast stream is the largest movement, extending from California and Arizona to Oregon and Washington. This stream is comprised primarily of documented and undocumented Mexicans, Central Americans, Vietnamese, Filipinos, and other Western Pacific immigrants.

For decades the economic health of this nation has depended on a steady stream of migrant workers moving through our farmland, yet we know very little about who they are, what their lives are like, what their needs are. A search of the Adult Basic Education (ABE) literature, for instance, reveals very little about the educational needs of the migrant adult. Educators interested in planning programs to reach this particular segment of the population find scarce information giving insight into the culture of migrancy. Most of what we have learned about the educational needs of migrant adults comes from research and articles on the educational needs of migrant youth. The Prewitt-Diaz, Trotter, & Rivera[1] ethnographic study, although intended to provide the necessary information to improve the identification and recruitment of migrant children for state school systems, gives us some insight into the needs of migrant parents. Research articles on migrant student dropout rates and dropout prevention provide information on potential ABE program participants.[5,6,7,8,9]

Migrant seasonal agricultural workers who follow the crops and harvests across the United States and Canada have little time to establish community contracts and are hardly noticed by most community members. The need to harvest a crop creates the demand for farmworkers. When that crop is harvested, the migrant worker packs up his wife, children and possessions and moves on to find new work. Lacking adequate education, and without advocates to protect their rights, migrant workers accept jobs that offer no benefits other than per hourly or by-bushel pay. Migrants are paid an average of $4.80 an hour or 40 cents for each bushel and do not receive retirement pension or have a hospitalization plan.

According to King-Stoops,[4] the first real migrant movement began after the Civil War when freed slaves fled north and were hired to do agricultural work. As the season changed, they would move with the crops, taking with them family and relatives. Migrancy became a way of life for them. All family members, children included, participated in the harvest. Children followed the migrant footsteps of their fathers, generation after generation.

The main reason migrants move from one area to another, from one state to another, is to find work. They may have a home-base to return to after the harvest or they may not. Prewitt-Diaz et al.[1] found that, contrary to the media stereotype, most migrant workers are U.S. citizens. Undocumented workers represent only 15% of all migrants.[10] Green card workers migrate annually from Mexico to California to participate in the citrus and grape harvest.

Prewitt-Diaz et al. have divided the migrant population into subcategories by ethnic background. The early migrant farm workers on the West Coast were Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos and Mexicans. A second group was composed of Blacks on the East Coast. The third group was Spanish-speaking migrants from Puerto Rico and Texas. This latter group moved into the midsection of the country.

In the first decade of this century, Blacks, primarily from Florida, moved to the Northeast. The predominant place of their resettlement was New York. Later, Blacks from other Southern states moved to industrial centers in the North. During the 1930s, the cultivation of winter vegetables attracted Black workers from other Southern states to Florida.[12] Migrant Blacks became a significant part of the farm labor force in the South. Years later this work force moved to the Northern states. The pattern continues today, although a marked decrease of Black migrant workers has been noted.

Mexican-American migrants are predominantly from Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California. The Mexican-Americans, the largest group of Hispanics in the United States, are approximately 13 million. There exists no reasonable estimate of the percentage of Mexican-Americans who are migrants; however, the Department of Education reports that about 60% of all migrant children accounted for by the education system are Mexican-American.

Puerto Ricans comprise the second largest Hispanic group in the United States. Their migration to the mainland began after World War II and constitutes the first airborne migration to the United States. They settled in the Northeastern states, as well as in Illinois and Michigan.

About 20 % of migrant farm workers are Anglo (of European extraction). They are located predominantly in the Northern states (Washington, Idaho, Montana, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Maine). This population works primarily on dairy farms or on farms where crops are cultivated and harvested by picking.

MIGRANCY AS A CULTURE

Although migrant workers share a certain lifestyle and many behavioural patterns, migrant groups differ in social and educational backgrounds. While many Asian and Hispanic-American migrants have some knowledge of English, some recently arrived immigrants are not literate even in their own language. For some, illiteracy is a result of their social and economic status, for others, illiteracy stems from the disruption in education caused by recent moves or political turmoil.[1] Some migrants from Haiti, Khmer, and Hmong come from areas with no written language or where there is a strong oral tradition of language learning.

A culture is broadly defined as the distinctive modes or ways of behaving that are shared by a group. The ethnographic study by Prewitt-Diaz et al.[1] focused on migrant children but in the process opened a window into migrant families and

their shared behaviour patterns. Some of the patterns mentioned in the study are:

Male & Female Roles

In most cases women are expected to work in the fields and do household chores. Men and children are usually exempt from household responsibilities. Marriage at a young age is common for female migrants and signals the end of schooling. In most migrant families there is enormous pressure for the males to support the family, and for females to have children. These complementary roles assist young migrant couples to survive but severely limit the chances for educational success and advancement.

Adult/Child Roles

Although all cultures differentiate between adult roles and children's behaviour, the age at which children begin to adopt adult roles varies for different cultures. In many migrant families, boys begin to be treated as adults when, at age 15 or 16, they can earn as much in the fields as their fathers. Girls start being treated as adults when they are capable of having children and managing a household. The difference between the role expectations of migrant families and those of the dominant society has serious consequences for educational programs. Most migrant children drop out of school when they are able to work in the fields and earn money. Migrant parents allow their children to make the decision between dropping out of, or staying in school.

Dealing with Social Institutions

Educational, health care and social service agencies are created to facilitate living in a complex society. One of the functions of culture is to teach how to best use the system of agencies. Migrants, especially those who come from a different linguistic and cultural background, are at a serious disadvantage because they do not understand the system. Some migrants strive to be independent and take pride in meeting their family needs; others suffer in silence because they do not know who could help them in time of trouble.

Powerlessness & the Migrant Cycle

The cycle of migrancy is very hard to break and many migrants feel trapped, with little hope for a better future for their children. This feeling of powerlessness is sometimes misinterpreted as apathy by educational agencies. Although

migrant parents express support for education for their children, they also feel that migrancy is the fate for them regardless of anything they say or do.

Attitude toward Authority

Migrants have a generally positive attitude towards authority, especially toward the schools. However, this attitude is occasionally expressed in a way that is culturally confusing to school personnel. Migrants trust the schools to know what is right for their children and feel that their questions about the appropriateness of their children's educational program will be construed as a challenge to the teacher's authority and prestige. The institution with which migrants most often interact is the school; ironically, the migrant lifestyle is the greatest impediment for their children's educational success.

Freire[11] stated that the lack of education is a form of oppression. For him the role of the educator is to understand and become part of the learner's culture, to stimulate learning in order to "free" or empower the individual. To reach the adult migrant population and to provide programs that would empower them, it is imperative that adult educators learn more about their culture. The studies cited by this article provide a starting point to understanding the educational needs of migrant adults but further research, particularly ethnographic research, will be useful to ABE programs intending to serve this population.

MIGRANT EDUCATION: A MULTIPLE SATELLITE PROGRAM

Federal legislation in the United States concerning migrant and seasonal farmworkers has historically included regulatory measures designed to improve the substandard working, occupational health, housing, and educational conditions encountered by this segment of the population. As part of an overall strategy in educational issues, program priority has been given to migrant and seasonal farmworker children. Early on, primary attention was given to primary school education, but in the past 10 to 15 years the attention has turned to supporting migrant youth in completing secondary education.

The programs designed to help migrant youth who dropped from school to complete high school requirements, are increasingly serving migrant adults. The College of Education at the University of Tennessee has been involved in the design and implementation of dropout retrieval programs for migrant and seasonal farmworkers since 1982. Funded by a grant from the Office of Migrant Education of the U.S. Department of Education, the University ran a residential program for migrant and seasonal farmworker school dropouts from 1982 to 1986. The goal was to prepare students to take the high school equivalency test, expecting that the college atmosphere would serve as incentive and motivate

these students to continue their education. The residential program was highly successful in assisting the recruited students to complete high school requirements but very few decided to enter higher education and there were very few changes in their quality of life. Very early in the recruiting process the University of Tennessee High School Equivalency (UT HEP) staff discovered another characteristic of these particular populations: although very few had a place to call home, they were very reluctant to leave family and friends to come to a strange place away from loved ones. Many were already involved in farmwork and their income was needed for the family sustenance.

The proposal presented by the University of Tennessee to the Department of Education for the 1987-1990 three-year cycle was for an ambitious multiple satellite program. The UT HEP targeted four states and proposed the establishment of four HEP sites. The intention was to bring the program to the student instead of bringing the student to the program. The four HEP sites were located near to areas with high concentration of migrant and seasonal farmworkers in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee.

Most recent research on the barriers to adult education participation point toward lack of motivation and interest as the major participation deterrent. The University of Tennessee High School Equivalency Program tested the veracity of this research conclusion. After four years of administrating a satellite program they have concluded that if you control external variables (i.e. transportation, child care, fees or cost, the time of the day, and location), migrant students are normally motivated and interested in completing their secondary school education. The yearly target was to serve 170 students, and each year of the three year cycle the program has surpassed the enrollment target.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

A quick examination of factors contributing to the overall success of the UT HEP under the satellite format reveals characteristics that are consistent with the characteristics of effective adult basic education programs:

- The program is geared to empower students by increasing their success experiences, self confidence and feeling of self-worth and dignity.
- Class schedule is flexible and classes are accessible to potential students.
- A strong promotion and recruitment program.
- Coordinators, recruiters, counselors and instructors are culturally and ethnically representative of the student body.
- Bilingual counselors are available and an intensive counseling program is implemented.
- Student assessment is an integral part of the program.

- Tutors are utilized.
- An individually tailored plan is developed for each student.
- Staff training and development activities are provided.
- Teacher and program effectiveness are regularly evaluated.
- Placement plans start at enrollment, and placement activities are geared to end in post-secondary education or competitive employment.

Myles Horton, the founder of the Highlander Research and Education Center and an American pioneer of adult education, once said: "I look at a person with two eyes. One eye tells me what he is; the other tells me what he can become". The goals and objectives of our programs are geared toward the student overcoming the cycle of poverty and migrancy and becoming a productive member of society. The success of the program in meeting this overall goal was better expressed by a former student:

> By attending the UT HEP I was really digging myself out of a mudhole.

The three years spent in implementing a residential program were not adequate training for the new format. However, the staff and administrators have learned a valuable lesson in program planning and implementation: to be flexible. The program has been recognized nationally as an effective dropout retrieval program because they have taken four important development steps:

1. Take the program to the student. Find where they are and locate the program there.
2. Make the program flexible enough to allow for family needs, work, etc.
3. Involve the other family members. Use family strengths for motivation and support. Keep the family unit intact.
4. Be familiar with and use other community resources to supplement services.

After four years following the non-resident/satellite format, the UT High School Equivalency Program is fully established. In order to better serve the population, the programs have become part of a net of programs and institutions in the community system. Each satellite is working in cooperation with a local community college. The program format has been recognized as a good example of interagency cooperation and coordination. Yet still, the sites' programs suffer from some of the problems experienced by other literacy programs:

- unstable attendance;
- enrollment drops if recruitment efforts are not maintained;
- the most needy student remains underserved since federal guidelines encourage serving those needing less instruction time.

The needs of migrant and seasonal farmworkers are many and complicated

by their isolation. These needs include:

- Available and affordable housing.
- Comprehensive health benefits and services.
- Adult basic education, vocational education, and literacy programs.
- Enforced protection from work-related illness and injuries.
- Employers' compliance with legally established fair employment practices.
- Compliance with child labor laws, and other worker-protective laws.

The number of adult education programs serving the migrant population is very small and the information available about the culture of migrancy is minimal. The few programs available are under funded and traditionally designed. Creative and flexible programs like UT HEP are limited by lack of funds and federal guidelines.

EL CENTRO ARCOIRIS

The goals of UT HEP and most programs serving migrant and seasonal farmworkers are defined by the funding agency. In most cases there is a single goal: to provide better health services, to provide motivation to further education, or to provide higher education opportunities. Concerned and dedicated staff members try to connect clients with other agencies under the belief that as migrants become the recipients of multiple services, their lot in life will improve, community members will become more receptive to their needs and more acceptant of their existence. Experience has also proved this belief faulty. A UT HEP graduate explained this way:

> It was not until I realized that nobody was going to do it for me, that I had to become self-sufficient, that things started happening for me. I am not saying that I did not receive help here and there. I am grateful to so many people! But the best thing they did for me was to help me help myself, and that is what I want to do for other migrants coming to this area.

El Centro Arcoiris started as a dream for this UT HEP graduate. She had dropped out of high school to become a mother. With her migrant husband and child she moved through the migrant Eastern stream in search for work until they decided to settle in a farming town in Western North Carolina. Her husband became a crew leader, bringing migrant workers from Mexico and Texas to work at the many farm surrounding the town. She was working at a migrant store when the UT HEP recruiter came inside looking for recruits for the literacy class. She was expecting her second child and was reluctant to enroll but after her concerns were satisfied, (child care, flexible class hours, etc.) she started attending classes and graduated a few days before her son was born. Today she owns her own migrant store, El Mercado Mejicano, and with the

assistance of other migrants and community members opened El Centro Arcoiris. The grassroots group that developed the idea of the centre listed the following as their goals:

1. To provide assistance with legal interpretation and advice.
2. To provide housing assistance. Part of the problem with workers coming to the area is that landlords will not rent their properties without a long term lease. Also there is a lack of communication because of the language barrier since most workers are hispanic. The centre will keep an updated list of landlords willing to rent to migrants and in this way eliminate much of the suffering that families experience when they arrive looking for housing.
3. To assist with agencies' document preparation and advise people on how to prepare their own official papers and to understand them.
4. To establish a food and clothes room for workers who arrive with very little.
5. To bring the experience of the hispanic culture to this area through art, music, dance and festivals to which the non-migrant community will be invited. In this way we will start bringing the worker in contact with the community.
6. To provide a place where literacy, English as a Second Language and other educational programs will be housed.

As the idea for the centre developed, the group faced a number of obstacles: securing a source of funding, finding a suitable location, getting community support, getting recently arrived migrants' participation. The UT HEP staff put the leaders in contact with The Highlander Research and Education Center where they received assistance on leadership training and researching funding sources. At the invitation of the migrant founders of the centre, and advisory committee of non-migrant community members has been formed and both groups are working together to develop the idea further. Through participatory research they have discovered the areas of greatest need among migrants, researched and secured some financial support, dealt with the court system and requested that a translator be hired to assist migrants having legal problems, convinced local merchants to use Spanish on store's signs and are diligently trying to secure enough funds to open a cultural centre. This group of migrant and seasonal farmworkers are determined not only to become self-reliant, but to make a contribution to the local community. They want the community to become familiar with their culture and their rich historical heritage.

The accomplishment of this grassroots group of migrant and seasonal farmworkers has no precedent in this Western North Carolina community. That some of the leaders are UT HEP graduates might not just be a coincidence. Although funded to provide high school equivalency education, the empowerment of this often invisible segment of the population has been the moving force behing most efforts. Yet of four satellite sites, only the migrants from this community are coming together in an empowered way. Undoubtedly a combination of factors have combined to provide fertile ground for the development of self assertion and

a sense of empowerment. The most obvious are:

- The gathering of a group of young migrants with inborn leadership skills.
- The sense of accomplishment experienced after a successful experience (receiving the high school equivalency diploma).
- The sense of support received from group concerned about the plight of this segment of the population (Migrant Health, Migrant Headstart, Farmworkers Organizations, Highlander, UT HEP, Catholic Services and other religious organizations).
- The dependency of local farmers on the influx of migrants to harvest their crops.
- The developing awareness of local merchants of the migrant population as target clients.
- The innate sense of independence characteristic of migrants.

REFLECTIONS

Building self-directedness and a sense of empowerment is the overriding goal of adult education programs. The concept of praxis, that is, exploring, acting and reflecting on new ideas, skills and knowledge, stresses that learning does not take place in a vacuum. Understanding and describing the context is central to learning and literacy. The desire of adult migrant workers to improve their literacy is often overcome by the pressures of everyday life to simply survive and by a sense of powerlessness. Their life context, their need for survival and their sense of powerlessness, is not often acknowledged by programs trying to reach this group. Only programs that acknowledge and affirm the historical and existential experiences of migrants will be able to reach this population.

Although El Centro Arcoiris has given a voice to migrants in this Western North Carolina community, migrants all over the nation are silent and invisible. Traditionally designed adult education programs are unable to reach them. The future of the education of migrant adults depends on the development of programs that empower the local migrant population to help themselves. The future of programs such as UT HEP will depend on how well they listen to the migrant's voice.

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