

A CASE STUDY DEALING WITH THE  
EDUCATION OF ONE MIGRANT FAMILY

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A Research Report  
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and  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
I. RATIONALE AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	1
II. RELATED LITERATURE	
A. MIGRANT CHILD LABOR	3
B. MIGRANT FAMILIES	4
C. EX-MIGRANTS	6
D. MIGRANT PARENTS' INFLUENCE AND VIEW ON THEIR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION	6
E. MIGRANT STUDENT'S VIEW OF EDUCATION	7
F. RELIGION	8
G. OTHER FINDINGS	9
III. PROCEDURE	10
IV. A CASE STUDY OF A MIGRANT FAMILY	12
V. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS	19
VI. BIBLIOGRAPHY	25
VII. APPENDICES	29

## TABLE OF APPENDICES

		<u>PAGE</u>
APPENDIX A	DEFINITION OF A MIGRANT CHILD	29
APPENDIX B	LIST OF PERSONS INTERVIEWED	30
APPENDIX C	LIST OF AUSTIN LIBRARIES FROM WHICH MATERIAL WAS RECEIVED	31
APPENDIX D	MAP OF LAREDO	32
APPENDIX E	MAP OF MIGRANT STREAMS	33
APPENDIX F	QUESTIONNAIRE USED FOR INTERVIEWS	34
APPENDIX G	TYPES OF MIGRANT HOMES IN LAREDO	36
APPENDIX H	GROWTH OF MIGRANT PROGRAM	38
APPENDIX I	INCOME LEVELS QUALIFICATIONS FOR MANPOWER	39
APPENDIX J	RATE OF UNEMPLOYMENT	40

## I. RATIONALE AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although many case studies have been made of migrant families and their problems, few if any have been done in Laredo. As a result of studies done elsewhere (one of the most revealing and astonishing was on television entitled "Harvest of Shame" CBS 1960), migrant families are now being treated as a special minority and are now being provided better housing, health facilities, and educational systems are finally coming to terms with the situation through the seven month-extended day classes for children of migrant workers (Texas Children's Migrant Program 1969). Still Laredo has a high drop-out rate (Davidson 1970), and many of these children belong to migrant families (Texas Children's Migrant Program 1969). The question posed in many studies is to determine why there is such a high rate of dropouts. However, using a different approach, the author shall attempt to add to the body of knowledge already in existence about the education

of children of migrant families by doing a case study of one migrant family where the one child who did not graduate was the exception and not the rule.

## II. RELATED LITERATURE

Related literature and studies which were of greatest value to this study will follow. Much of the related literature concerns itself not only with the education of the migrant but with other factors that also influence the migrant and his children in their behavior towards education.

### A. Migrant Child Labor

In 1929 George B. Mangold made a study for the National Child Labor Committee and cited two reasons for child labor among the migrants: (1) seasonal occupations and (2) availability to travel by car.

In 1950 a pamphlet issued by the US Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Standards summarized the status of agricultural workers under State and Federal Laws. It pointed out that there were only a few states with no federal laws regulating child labor or the conditions under which they worked. However, it was not known whether these laws were actually enforced (Manuell 1965).

In 1961 the Texas Employment Commission reported 90,000 migrants from Texas and one-third of them were children under fourteen years old (Manuel 1965). This year despite state and federal laws there is still a lot of child labor in existence due to the lack of enforcement of these laws (Time 1973).

B. Migrant Families

In 1957 a survey was made in South Texas to provide a cross-section of the homebase area of migrant workers who moved annually to harvest crops in a 34 state area. Some of the conclusions arrived at by this study were:

- (1) Migrant families are unusually large and this has much to do with their migration.
- (2) The head of the family felt responsible in training his children to become self-supporting.
- (3) Children under ten also worked.
- (4) The Mother would also work out in the fields.
- (5) South Texas migrants were mainly the youth in large families.
- (6) The education of the migrant children who were placed in northern schools was very poor. They were not placed in regular classes.

They were usually given songs to sing or some type of busy work to keep them out of the regular classes.

- (7) Younger workers had 3-6 years of schooling; Older workers had no schooling at all. Of those who had had some form of schooling, they had been detained in one or more grades. (Metzler 1962)

Morales(1965) suggested that the migrants seem to belong nowhere.

"The children frequently remain outside attendance laws, unwelcomed in the classroom, ignored by their classmates. The hurt of never belonging, of moving from camp to camp and from school to school is one from which few migrant children recover."

One of the farmers who came out in the CBS presentation "Harvest of Shame" in 1960 contended that migrants like the gypsy life and "do not know anybetter."

Despite the hard work and terrible working and living conditions, farmers still argue that migrants are "happy doing what they're doing" (Montgomery 1973).



C. Ex-Migrants

A survey of ex-migrants pointed out two types:

(1) family that lost some of its workers because they left home or because they obtained local employment

(2) family with so many young children that it was difficult and uneconomical to migrate (Metzler 1962).

D. Migrant Parents' Influence and View on their Children's Education.

The two factors most strongly related to scholastic aspiration of migrant students were parental based-- parental interest in school attendance and the financial situation of the parents (Schnur 1972).

The parents are convinced that their children should continue their education but their actions contradicted their verbal statements (Orr 1965; Congreve 1966; Caskey 1970; Ulibarri 1971).

Migrant parents often have negative experiences in their brief years of exposure to public school education; consequently, they are afraid of making things worse for their children by their visiting school to try to clear misunderstandings (Orr 1965; Focus 1970).

Ulibarri (1971) noted that due to ignorance regarding the nature of education, complacency seemed to prevail regarding the school's programs for their children.

E. Migrant Student's View of Education

For many children of migratory families the point of confrontation and conflict is the school, since until he enters into this institution of education, he probably has never thought of his life as less desirable than others for his family and peers have been his sole point of reference (Orr 1965; Ott 1968).

Heffernan (1964) fostered the idea that:

"Every teacher knows that a child who feels self-conscious about either the quality or cleanliness of his clothing as compared to other children cannot give his full attention to learning to read, to the understanding of math, or to any other part of the educational program."

Fallan (1966) argued that the student contemplating the idea of dropping out does so when he feels that the teacher is not sensitive to his values as a person.

Edgar (1963) contended that Texas Dropouts have four things in common:

- (1) they do not like school
- (2) they have dropped behind their grade level
- (3) they are older than their classmates
- (4) they know they are typed as failures by the school

Cardenas (1968) listed the same ideas of the Texas Migrant dropout as Edgar with the exception of the first one. He added that: (1) 1/5 of migrant children never even enter school. (2) More trained and competent teachers are needed to work with migrant pupils. (3) There is a lack of communication between the school and parents. Gomez (1968) believed that "it has been our programs that have been inadequate and that is why the migrant children have not experienced success."

#### F. Religion

There appear to be two contradicting views concerning the migrants and their religion. One idea is that religion is not a strong factor in the lives of these people (Orr 1965, Ulibarri 1971). The opposing view is that Catholicism did play an

important role in developing their attitudes of fatalism and resignation (Madsen 1964; Hernandez 1971).

G. Other Findings

Even though there were 45 school districts with established specialized programs for migrant children only 31,000 of the 85,000 migrant children in Texas were served by such schools in 1967 (Caskey 1970).

"Findings that Mexican-Americans have high social achievement goals not only contradict some widely shared assertions about lower class youth, it is a direct critical attack on the aged stereotypes of Mexican-Americans as being a non-motivated, backward, lackadaisical people." (Wright 1972)

All of these studies and related literature have dealt with child labor, migrant families, ex-migrants, their view on education, religion, and reasons for Texas high dropout rate.

## III. PROCEDURE

The investigator decided to interview one parent of one migrant family for the following reasons:

- (1) The availability and familiar acquaintance with the female to be interviewed.
- (2) The peculiarity of this family's education, i.e., neither parent had a formal education and yet all of their children (with the exception of one) managed to graduate despite all the shortcomings confronting migrants.
- (3) The father of this family is a skilled worker (bricklayer and carpenter) and yet they decided to migrate in 1963.

Besides interviewing this person, the author talked to other people who some way or other have dealt with migrants (Appendix B).

In addition, the author did research in the Texas A & I University at Laredo Library and also received material from other libraries (Appendix C).

Kleinert (1968) in doing his research found that

there is no such thing as the typical migrant. However, migrants do have some attitudes and life styles that they share. By interviewing one person the author felt that she might be able to get some insight as to what made the difference between this one family's educational achievements and the usual migrant family's educational achievements.

#### IV. A CASE STUDY OF A MIGRANT FAMILY

There are four boys and three girls in this particular migrant family. They were all born in North Laredo in one of the migrant concentration areas (appendix D). Their present ages are 23, 22, 21, 17, and 11 years old. The parents are 58 and 53 years old. The father of the family is a Mexican immigrant. The mother was born in Welder, Texas.

The author interviewed the mother of this family for about three hours. She was very responsive and cooperative. She is very young looking and heavy built. A grandmother of six children her hair is still naturally black. Even though she does understand English and can speak the language, the entire interview was conducted in Spanish in order to be more at ease.

Her family was a migrant family with eight children. Her father was a crew leader. Her mother would not work in the fields. The children would all work as soon as they were able to do so.

Both of her parents valued an education enough to place them in private schools. She does not know

why they were not placed in public schools. She did go as far as the third grade. She does recall that when they lived in a ranch outside of Robstown, the school bus driver would not pick up Mexican-Americans. She also remembers the embarrassment she felt going to school <sup>with children</sup>, much younger than she was. This was when they decided to move to town for educational purposes.

She married young but she did not bear children until she was thirty. When she had her seventh child (all Caeserean born), she suggested to her husband the idea of migrating to California to look for work. Her reasons being:

- (1) a growing family
- (2) lack of local jobs
- (3) to better themselves

Her husband objected at first, but finally agreed to go when she told him that they could consider it a vacation trip to California where her mother lived. This was in 1963. They did so well this first summer and they had few problems (her mother would take care of the younger children while they worked) that they decided to return in '64 and in '65. In 1966, California had a bad year cropwise. They decided



to go to Minnesota.(Appendix E). They returned every summer to Minnesota until 1972. this year her husband received an offer from Killeen, Texas to work in construction making \$7 per hour. She went to Corpus Christi to work as domestic help, but she was asked to return to Minnesota and work for six weeks as a cook. She felt that in Minnesota a migrant worker gets many fringe benefits including free hospitalization, medicine, doctors' care, etc. The pay is also better. Since her older sons are married(two are working in Killeen with their father; another one is in the Navy and the youngest is still too young), they will definitely be out of the migrant stream as a family. However, she will keep returning to Minnesota every summer for six weeks to work as a cook mainly because of the pay and fringe benefits.

Migrant Child Labor. When asked about migrant child labor, she told the interviewer that the law is getting stricter. The age minimum used to be twelve years; it then went up to fourteen years; and now it will be sixteen years. She commented that the children

are separated from the grown-ups , and the bus drivers are instructed as to what age levels to pick up. She added that her children were all fully developed and wanted to work in the fields and that was the only reason why they allowed them to do so. In order to be able to work, they have to have their ages registered as soon as they get there. To avoid any conflicts, she lied about some of the children's ages. Nobody questioned her, and they were able to work when they were as young as nine years.

Migrant Families : Concerning migrant families, she suggested that there were other migrant families much larger than theirs who made only half of their earnings(\$5000 in two months), because they did not care for this type of work or were just plain lazy. This type of family will not return to the fields. Their personal reason for not returnign was that there was no sense in her husband returning by himself to work out in the fields. the idea is to get the whole family working together in order to make enough money to make their hard labor profitable. None of their relatives or neighbors were migrants.

Education: Her view of education was that since no one

in her family or her husband's (he went to school in Mexico, only as far as the sixth grade) had finished high school they wanted their children to finish high school. For this reason, they would wait for the school term to end and then they would return in time for the beginning of classes. In this way, none of them ever missed any schooling because of their migration.

School Program: Concerning the school program, she felt that no matter how difficult, if the children wanted to learn, they could learn whatever it was they had to learn. Of one family whom she was acquainted with, only one of ten children had graduated. She felt that the others had no interest in school or else due to lack of intelligence, they had quit school.

One of her girls will soon graduate from nursing school in San Antonio. She has received scholarships throughout her four years of her college career. Her mother told the interviewer that even if she had not received the scholarships, they would have sent her to college one way or another.

One of her sons went to an IBM school in San

Antonio. They paid for his tuition. However, after a couple of months he dropped out because he felt that he was not being taught properly (By the mother's description, it was all independent study), and he was going to be drafted anyway. Therefore, he dropped out and enlisted himself in the Navy.

Their mother pointed out that they would not coerce their children into school even though they would have liked for all of them to have gone to college. She felt that a high school education had been a great accomplishment for all of them.

During the course of the migrancy she never noticed any kind of urge to drop school or the migrating from any of her children.

Religion: When they were working they rarely went to church, because they would even work on Sundays to take advantage of the weather conditions. When they returned home, they were and still are very active members.

Other Observations: As the interviewer talked to this very happy person, she could see the fruits of their labor all about them: a three bedroom brick home fully and beautifully furnished, wall-to-wall

carpeting, a stereo console, a 25" color television, a huge air-conditioning unit, a dining set and china cabinet, and many more material things they would never have acquiree had they never migrated.

Since their backyard was big enough, another brick house was built on it for their eldest son. It is presently unoccupied since he is working in Killeen with his father making \$5.50 per hour, ten hours a day, 6 days a week.

In short, the author could denote the pleasure and rewards acquired by this family in their nine years of summer migration without an ounce of guilt felt by their parents concerning their children's education or well-being.

## V. RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The basic problem is low and sporadic income in the industry resulting from the low skill requirements of most related occupations. The low educational level of the target area residents effectively limits their ability to compete in the more stable and higher income producing occupations of which few exist (Manpower, 1968).

This quote relating to migrants and their work has some facts which are true of most migrant families, but not of the particular family being discussed. Even though they do not have a low educational level, they still look for jobs outside Laredo. They are skilled workers since their father who is a bricklayer and carpenter has taught them all he knows. Nevertheless, the author would conclude that this particular family would never have thought twice of looking for work somewhere outside of Laredo had it not been for their experience as migrants.

Concerning the mother's education, Mexican-Americans used to be separated from the regular classes. Schools would have separate classrooms for the few Mexican -American children who did go to school. This was declared unconstitutional

in 1949 in the Minerva Delgado vs. the State of Texas Case (hearing 1968), and yet we now have separate campuses for migrant children even here in Laredo.

When talking to Mr. Arturo Gutierrez, principal of the local migrant school, the author was impressed with the fact that the migrant children who do attend these special school are given free lunch, free medical and dental care, free clothing, and furthermore, the school program has been specially designed for the migrant child.

Like many other families, this particular family took the plunge into migrancy for the first time with the thought that they had the alternative of considering it a vacation trip to visit their relatives (Madsen 1964).

Comparing their home to other migrants' homes here in Laredo (Appendix G), the author concluded that this migrant family had fared off very well and had used their money mainly for improvements on their home.

As far as their education, it would appear that migrating did not in anyway hurt the family's chance for an education. In fact, it might have helped them decide that this would be what they

would be doing for the rest of their lives if they did not get an education.

The daughter who decided to get married before graduating is now trying to finish her high school education through a special program for migrants. She works part time and goes to school part time while her three children are taken care of by domestic help.

Due to the time limitation and due to the fact that the other family members were not available for interviewing, and since this was only one of many migrant families, conclusions made would be extremely biased. Nevertheless, one conclusion arrived at by the author, after talking to different people is that there are many agencies willing to help migrants acquire an education, get out of the stream, or both if possible. Beginning with the pre-school children, the Texas Migrant Council sees to it that they get their schooling year round by the use of a very effective mobile unit that follows the families. In addition, they get free food



and free medical care. Some of the teachers were migrants themselves; therefore, they are very well acquainted with the needs and weaknesses of these children. Following the pre-school program is the Migrant School specially designed for the migrant child. It is a seven-month extended day program beginning in October and ending in April. This program has been steadily growing (Appendix H). The family discussed never went to this school because they never left early or arrived late for classes. Now with all the extra benefits, the youngest child still does not prefer to attend this school because he claims that all his friends are in the regular school. Also, he prefers a shorter day and more holidays during in the year.

Another conclusion arrived at was that some agencies are trying to relocate these families here in East Texas by helping them first finish their education and then getting some kind of training. This is to get them out of the stream.

They have to qualify for this type of program. Victor Villarreal, local supervisor for Manpower Education and Training, related to the author that the main qualification is their income level (Appendix I). He added that during the summer months when the unemployment rate goes up all over Texas (Appendix J), most migrant families are in the North working. Consequently, it is hard to recruit the fifteen families that are eligible for this program.

There are other agencies also willing to help these families, but not necessarily to convince them of a different type of life.

Still other agencies seem to contradict themselves. They first define a migrant child (Appendix A). They help him one summer making him a non-migrant ineligible for the program the succeeding year.

In all, the author would again like to point out that there are many factors involved in trying to analyze a family's behavior. Some

of the ideas not investigated such as peer approval, the children's school attitudes and aptitudes, relationships with teachers, neighbors, etc., could have had a much greater influence on this family's behavior than some of the ones studied. Perhaps other studies can be made locally where some of these factors, if not all, can be studied in order to add to the body of knowledge already in existence about the education of migrant children.

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