

The Undocumented: Educating the Children of Migrant Workers in America

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Abstract

Immigration is not a new phenomenon in America. The education of undocumented or migrant children, however, continues to pose unique social, political, and educational problems for America's schools. Social and educational opportunities are typically hindered by frequent moves, poverty, gaps in previous schooling, and language barriers. Poverty, language, and cultural differences add to the challenges posed by mobility, the identifying characteristic of migrant students. Moving from place to place makes it difficult to attend school regularly, learn at grade level, accrue credits, and meet all graduation requirements. It is also difficult to participate in socializing activities and create the social networks critical to social mobility. Mobility makes it harder to receive the adult support most young people need academically, socially, psychologically, and emotionally. Migrant students also confront serious societal and institutional barriers. Anti-immigrant fears are stoked by allegations that undocumented immigrants increase the costs of social services, including education. Whatever their circumstances, undocumented children are entitled to receive an education in the United States.

The country is in the midst of its most profound demographic shift since the 1890s, a time that opened a period of the greatest immigration we have seen, whose numbers have not been matched until right now. A deluge of new Americans from every part of the world is overwhelming our traditional distinctions. . . . The categories themselves inevitably reflect the temporal bias of every age and that becomes a problem when the nation itself is undergoing deep and historic diversification. (Wright, 1994, p. 48)

By denying these children a basic education, we deny them the ability to live within the structure of our civic institutions, and foreclose any

realistic possibility that they will contribute in even the smallest way to the progress of the Nation. (Justice Thurgood Marshall, quoted in *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982, p. 231)

Introduction

Children of migrant farm workers, fishery workers, and factory workers are among the most educationally disadvantaged children in the United States (Salerno, 1991). The rapid increase in migrant families and its concomitant effects upon public schools within the United States have been staggering. The increasing number of migrant children, namely Latino children, filling public school seats has caused some states and communities to rethink their educational policies.

Migrants are often defined as farm workers who follow the crops across the country or from one country to another, returning home for the winter harvest (Bartlett & Vargas, 1991). The conditions associated with the migratory lifestyle impose obstacles to social and educational achievement. These obstacles include social and cultural isolation, strenuous and hazardous work, extreme poverty, and poor health conditions (Strange & Gutmann, 1993; Fix & Passel, 1994a; Brimelow, 1995; Adger & Peyton, 1999). Limited proficiency in English imposes an additional burden on many migrant children (Henderson, Daft, & Gutmann, 1994; Adger & Peyton, 1999).

The children of workers who move with their families to seek temporary or seasonal work in factories, agriculture, and fishing are considered migrant students under the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994. Older youth (ages 12–21), who often enter the school system with little educational experience, frequently do not speak English. In the United States, they suffer continuing interruptions in their schooling, conditions that increase their chances of educational failure, delinquency, and poverty.

To shed light on this problem, this paper discusses the growing dilemma of public schooling for migrant children, that is, children born outside the United States who live in this country without the legal permission of the federal government. Most are children of rural agricultural workers; others are children of urban service and manufacturing workers. In the United States, universal education includes all children, including migrant children, partly because education promotes skilled workers and taxpayers who contribute to the general well-being of the nation. Nonetheless, the mandate to educate migrant children provokes xenophobia, from which these children require special protection. This paper briefly examines educational practices and policies that prepare migrant students and recommends strategies for addressing students' needs and ensuring access and equity in their schooling.

Immigration, Legislation, and the Law

Issues of migration and undocumented persons have always stirred controversy in the United States. Columbia University historian Alan Brinkley, among others, documented the vicissitudes of America's unfavorable attitudes toward "new" immigrants. He pointed out several anti-immigrant measures in *The Unfinished Nation* (1993).

In 1790, the U.S. Congress enacted a law to initiate residency requirements. The Alien Act of 1798 gave the president of the United States the authority to expel aliens. In 1868, the Burlingame Treaty facilitated Chinese immigration, which helped satisfy the country's growing demand for workers. Later, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was passed because it was believed that Asian immigrants were driving wages to a substandard level and taking jobs away from White Americans. In the same period, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down state laws requiring payment of bond or tax by persons bringing immigrants into the United States.

In 1891, Congress enacted the first comprehensive federal immigration law, which included a provision permitting the exclusion of persons "likely to become a public charge" if admitted to the United States. After 1910, Congress enacted a series of restrictive immigration laws. In 1911, the U.S. Immigration Commission (Dullingham Commission) issued a report stating that immigration was damaging the United States and called for restrictions on immigration from southern and eastern Europe. Literacy requirements for immigrants were imposed. In 1924, Congress established the U.S. Border Patrol and the first immigration quota system favoring countries in western and northern Europe.

As a reaction to cold war fears, the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 restricted communists and other supposed undesirables and reaffirmed congressional support for a national origins quota system. However, in 1965, the Immigration and Nationality Act repealed the national origins quota system and gave first preference to immigrants uniting with family members already in the United States. Though the national origins quota system was repealed, anti-immigrant sentiment was still strong, as evidenced by the Supreme Court's unanimous decision in the *Mathews v. Diaz* case (1965) to uphold federal regulation denying Medicare benefits to aliens unless they resided in the United States for at least 5 years. Furthermore, the Supreme Court justices noted that budget concerns were sufficient to justify withholding benefits.

Anti-immigrant sentiment continued in the 1970s with calls for the reestablishment of immigration policies of exclusion. However, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Graham v. Richardson* (1976) unanimously overturned state laws denying welfare benefits to legal aliens. Eventually, anti-immigrant sentiment focused upon the educational rights of immigrants in the United States

In 1982, the Supreme Court, in *Plyler v. Doe*, discussed the constitutionality of a Texas law that attempted to deny undocumented school-age children the free public education that the state provided to children who were U.S. citizens or legally admitted aliens. Justice Brennan, writing for the majority, maintained

that illegal aliens can claim all of the benefits of the Equal Protection Clause. The majority opinion also held that if the state were to deny a discrete group of innocent children the free public education it offered to other children residing within its borders, that denial should be justified by showing that it furthered some substantial state interest. However, the court found that “whatever savings might be achieved by denying these children an education, they are wholly insubstantial in light of the costs involved to these children, the State and the Nation” (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982, p. 267).

In brief, the court found that education plays a pivotal role in maintaining the social fabric of educating good citizens in our society as well as maintaining our political and cultural heritage. The court further recognized, consistent with research, that undocumented families and their minor children are likely to remain in the United States and, at some point, legalize their immigrant status (Hiller & Leone, 1995). The decision signaled unprecedented civil protection for illegal aliens.

Following the court’s decision in *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986, imposing sanctions on employees who hire illegal aliens. The legislation also established an amnesty program for undocumented aliens already in the United States. Legislative support for legal aliens continued in the 1990s. The Immigration Act of 1990 expanded quotas for legal immigration, aiming to permit increased immigration from European countries (Petronicolos & New, 1999; Coichiro, 1996).

Calls for anti-immigration policy began at the state level. On November 8, 1994, California’s Proposition 187, “The Save Our State Initiative,” by popular vote, prohibited undocumented children from enrolling in public schools or receiving medical services, and required school and health service personnel to verify the legal status of students they suspected of being in the state illegally. They were to submit this information to local, state, and federal Immigration and Naturalization Service officials. California’s Proposition 187 “would have excluded approximately 308,000 children from the schools, and required public schools to verify the legal status of undocumented students and their parents” (Adger & Peyton, 1999, p. 22).

The measure was promptly challenged by immigrant and civil liberties groups. In fact, federal judicial authority superseded California voters. U.S. District Court Judge Mariana Pfaeizer rejected Proposition 187 as unconstitutional, pointing out that authority over immigration lies exclusively with the federal government (Christian, 2001; Adger & Peyton, 1999).

In the summer of 1996, Congress proposed the exclusion of undocumented children from public schools in the Immigration in the National Interest Act. On March 20, 1996, the House of Representatives passed an amendment sponsored by Republican Elton Gallegly of California that gave states the option of denying free public education to the children of illegal immigrants. However, this amendment was later defeated in the Senate. Had the Gallegly Amendment passed, it would have transformed portions of California’s

Proposition 187 into federal law. Notably, House Speaker Newt Gingrich, a Georgia Republican, backed the proposed amendment: “Offering free tax-paid goods to illegal immigrants have increased the number of illegals. . . . This used to be the land of opportunity; now it’s the land of welfare” (*The Washington Post*, 1996, p. A6).

The Gallegly Amendment was attached to the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act but was omitted in the final bill. This amendment (opposed by many police departments) would have placed a sizable population of children on the streets, in the fields, or in other unsafe conditions while their parents worked. The final version of the bill, although it did not contain the education provisions, did limit access of legal immigrants to welfare benefits, increased enforcement efforts by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and increased militarization of the border between the United States and Mexico (Crandall, Bernachee, & Prager, 1998; Fix & Passel, 1994a).

Based on the Immigration to the National Interest Act of 1996, Congress passed a national policy concerning welfare and immigration on October 6, 1997. This policy emphasized that noncitizens should have limited access to public benefits. The act stated:

The Congress makes the following statements concerning national policy with respect to welfare and immigration: (1) Self-sufficiency has been a basic principle of the United States immigration law since this century’s earliest immigration statutes. (2) It continues to be the immigration policy of the United States that—(A) aliens within the Nation’s borders not depend on public resources to meet their needs, but rather rely on their own capabilities and the resources of their families, their sponsors, and private organizations and, (B) the availability of public benefits does not constitute an incentive for immigration to the United States. (8 U.S.C. § 1601, 1997)

To date, these immigration provisions have not changed. However, with regard to “eligibility for public education,” immigration regulations yield to the court’s decision in *Plyler*.

Immigration and the Quest for Social Opportunity

From World War I to the present, migrant workers have contributed to American food abundance while their dependents have suffered malnutrition, health problems, educational deprivation, and poverty. They have been subjected to some of the harshest housing and labor conditions that the United States has ever known (*Novedades*, 1995; Fix & Passel, 1994b). With the increase in immigration to the United States, regrettably, these conditions persist.

Contrary to popular belief, some migrant workers are legal citizens (Adger & Peyton, 1999). Although the stereotype persists that all migrant workers are “wetbacks,” in reality, migrant workers are composed not only of Latinos, but

also a large number of African Americans, Afro-Caribbean migrants, and poor Whites. Many are second- and third-generation workers who were pushed off the land when farming changed from a highly labor-intensive operation to one of mechanization. Although the migrant lifestyle is lived by about a million people, for the most part, they are invisible (Bean, Chapa, Berg, & Sowards, 1994; Hiller & Leone, 1995; Goldsberg, 1996; Government Accounting Office, 2000).

Some reports suggest that it is impossible to gauge the size of the migrant agricultural work force with any precision because, among other reasons, many of the workers are transient. On the other hand, some demographic researchers note that, depending on the crop, anywhere from 30% to 60% of migrant farm workers are in the United States illegally (Bean et al., 1994; Schlosser, 1995; Miller, 1997). In addition, the Government Accounting Office reported in 2000 that the number of undocumented migrants ranges from 3.5 million to 4.8 million. The report also estimated that there are over 1 million migrant farm workers, documented and undocumented, in the United States (see Table 1). The Urban Institute further suggests that there are 650,000 migrant children traveling with their families, mostly from a Mexican residence to a U.S. residence, most often in California or Texas (Huddle, 2000).

Table 1

Undocumented Aliens and Their Children in the United States

State	Total undocumented population	Percentage of total population that is undocumented	Undocumented children enrolled in public K-12	Percentage of total K-12 that is undocumented
California	1,566,000	5.0	307,000	5.8
New York	490,000	2.5	88,000	3.2
Texas	389,000	2.1	93,900	2.6
Florida	356,000	2.6	97,200	4.8
Illinois	188,000	1.6	23,600	1.2
New Jersey	125,000	1.6	16,300	1.2
Arizona	62,000	1.5	15,000	2.2
Massachusetts	52,000	1.2	12,500	1.8
Virginia	42,000	1	10,250	1.6
Georgia	36,000	1	9,000	1.2
Total for 10 states	4,872,000			

Note. Information from *Fiscal Impacts of Undocumented Aliens*, by D. Huddle, Washington, DC: Urban Institute Press, 2000.

Bartlett and Vargas (1991) describe the typical migrant farm worker in the United States as Latino; from Mexico, Central America, or Puerto Rico; between the ages of 15 and 44; having an average of 5.5 years of schooling; and not literate in his or her language, which is usually Spanish. Data also suggest that most migrant families in the United States follow familiar geographic routes. Shotland (1989) discusses three distinct streams: the East Coast Stream, the Mid-continent Stream, and the West Coast Stream.

Migrant Patterns and Economic Opportunity

The East Coast Stream consists of Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals, Anglos, Jamaicans, Haitian Blacks, and Puerto Ricans. This route includes the states along the eastern seaboard and the southern United States. The Mid-continent Stream primarily consists of Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals with small numbers of American Indians; the route begins in south Texas and moves through the midwestern and western states. The West Coast Stream starts in California and moves up through Oregon and Washington; it is also composed of a majority of Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals, although recently it has included an increasing number of Southeast Asians (Rothenberg, 1998; Hansen, 1998).

To date, the United States has a growing number of children whose parents harvest a significant part of the nation's crops. These children and their parents migrate from three large "sending" or "home base" states (California, Texas, and Florida) to the 45 continuous "receiving" states. Migrant workers move throughout these states seeking employment.

Employment for migrant workers is, by definition, seasonal and temporary in nature. To make their work as continuous as possible, migrants travel with the growing season, fanning northward in three main strands through the West, the East, and the broad central sweep of the United States. Migrant families work in what is called "the stream." They follow the harvest from state to state. Beginning at the "home base," some will proceed to Arizona to pick lettuce and cauliflower, move to Utah to work sugar beets, move to Idaho to work potatoes, and then move to pick apples in Washington and grapes, oranges, and strawberries in California. Others follow the stream that ends in Michigan, while others move along the eastern states to upstate New York (Valle, 1994; Schlosser, 1995; Rothenberg, 1998).

Many will make the journey back to the home base after the harvest and work in the vegetable and fruit fields of the extreme South during the winter. For these families, the workdays are from sunup to sundown. On occasion, the days are devoid of work for various reasons: rain, the crops are not ready to harvest, or the harvest is completed. All work is paid for by the amount of food harvested; often, the total amount earned is very low (Schlosser, 1995; Valle, 1994; Wright, 1994; Coles, 1971).

The most obvious problem for migrant workers and their families is financial. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the typical migrant adult earns under \$8,500 a year (Government Accounting Office, 2000). Jobs are usually seasonal and inconsistent, and workers are not generally covered by employee benefit programs (Government Accounting Office, 2000). In addition, because of residency problems, language barriers and unfamiliarity with available local resources, most migrant families receive few social, economic, health, or educational services. In the United States, farm workers are almost universally exempted from both minimum wage coverage and unemployment insurance (Valle, 1994; Rothenberg, 1998). The need to travel ceaselessly in search of work effectively prohibits welfare assistance: In order to wait out the normal processing time for welfare applications, a migrant family would have to stop in one place, without money, for weeks, rather than moving and looking for work (Schlosser, 1995).

The living and working conditions of migrant families pose a serious health problem. Risks include injury from farm machinery and equipment, poor sanitation, chronic and acute exposure to chemicals, constant physical demands, and exposure to bad weather. Many families lack clean drinking water. Living quarters are usually dilapidated farmhouses, field barracks, small shacks, or impoverished shelters (Shotland, 1989; Prewitt-Diaz, Trotter, & Rivera, 1990; Government Accounting Office, 2000). As a result, Huang (1993) notes that the average life expectancy of migrant farm workers is 49 years and they often suffer and die from many occupation-related and poverty-related illnesses. Infant mortality and mortality rates for children are substantially higher than those of the general U.S. population (Government Accounting Office, 2000).

Even though living conditions are poor and medical care is virtually nonexistent, migrant families continue to return year after year to harvest the nation's bounty and move on, for the most part silent and invisible. Daniel Rothenberg's (1998) *With These Hands: The Hidden World of Migrant Farmworkers Today* and Isabel Valle's (1994) *Fields of Toil: A Migrant Family's Journey* portray the stories of immigrant workers describing the migrant trek of a caravan of trucks, a few buses, a single car or two, all filled to the brim with migrants. When the vehicles stop, they do so beside bushes and under trees. The point is to be inconspicuous, to hide, to disappear from sight. So, a number of families disperse, become small bands of people here and there, anxious for the ground as a resting place and anxious to blend into things. They merge with their surroundings and hide away from the world that atlases and census bureaus take note of, from the world of police and the government, from the merely curious, and even from the openly concerned. The next day, when light approaches, the trek resumes and the risks of travel begin again (Government Accounting Office, 2000; Prewitt-Diaz et al., 1990).

Prewitt-Diaz, Trotter, and Rivera (1990) conducted an ethnographic study of migrants in 10 states. Their report was the result of 3,000 hours of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and life histories. They recorded

two patterns of migration: intrastate and interstate. The major reason for migration was economic. Deciding where to move and when was based on knowledge about the length of seasons, timing of crops, changing agricultural conditions, rates of pay, and availability of housing. Migrants talked of isolation and constant adjustment to new surroundings. As one interviewee stated, "It's hard to always leave and say goodbye all the time" (p. 48).

Stresses on migrant families are enormous (Schlosser, 1995). Child abuse reports reveal a dark side of migrant family life, child maltreatment. The level of maltreatment among migrant families is much higher than for the general population (Lawless, 1986). Findings indicate that there is a differential risk of maltreatment depending on migrant status, family structure, and age. Intrastate migrant families have a higher incidence of reported maltreatment than interstate migrant families. Children from single-parent families and younger children have a higher probability of being maltreated (Government Accounting Office, 2000; Brimelow, 1995; Fix & Passel, 1994b; Salerno, 1991).

Robert Coles's (1971) classic study of migrant families is still a clear representation of what life is like for a migrant family. He reports that the family is always stooping and picking, always doing what needs to be done. Lives are impoverished, hungry, and uncertain; there is always the next place to go. Children learn early that each new day brings backbreaking toil for their parents and that after one field is picked, there will be a trip to another one, which may be in a new county or a new state.

Nearly 20 years after Coles's study, the video documentary *New Harvest, Old Shame* (Moon, 1990) reveals that hardships for migrant workers have not changed much for migrant families in 30 years. U.S. Representative Albert Bustamante, a Texas Democrat, suggests that his experiences as a migrant child working in the fields and enduring the hardships of seasonal work have not changed. In fact, in *The Fields of Toil: A Migrant Family's Journey* (Valle, 1994), he notes: "Low pay. Long hours. Oppressive heat. Lack of jobs. Lack of housing. Lack of medical care. Lack of education. But that was then. This is now. Low pay. Long hours. Oppressive heat. Lack of housing. Lack of medical care. Lack of education" (p. 9). In spite of these persistent conditions, undocumented migrant workers contribute significantly to the economic well-being of the United States.

Impact of Migrant Workers on the American Economy

The labor provided by migrant and seasonal farm workers is one element necessary for a stable agricultural industry in the United States. This labor has been exploited in a manner that has enabled certain sectors in agriculture to enjoy substantial profits. Neither established labor unions nor new labor organizations have succeeded in altering the exploitation of this labor force (Goldsberg, 1996).

The importance of migrant workers, especially undocumented workers, to the agricultural economy of the United States cannot be understated. Migrants' importance to the economy, particularly the food supply in the United States, is stressed by Schlosser (1995), who reminds us that "nearly every head of lettuce, every bunch of grapes, every avocado, peach and plum" is still picked by hand (p. 82). This food comes to us inexpensively because of the labor of the migrant families, namely the labor of undocumented migrant children (Huang, 1993; Fix & Passel, 1994b; Hiller & Leone, 1995; Rothenberg, 1998; Government Accounting Office, 2000). Despite the contributions they make to the nation's economic well-being, specifically in providing cheap labor for our food supply, migrant families are woefully poor and widely reviled and depicted as welfare cheats. They are also perceived as taking jobs from U.S. citizens and as a drain on the economy.

On the contrary, economic and labor market studies reveal that both documented and undocumented aliens do not take jobs from U.S. citizens, but rather create jobs and contribute to the growth and vitality of the U.S. economy (Christian, 2001). Specifically, Mexican American immigrants, through their low wages, subsidize not only agriculture, but also parts of the garment and service industries. Immigrants also pay substantial taxes, according to Karn, Olsen, and Raffel (1993), who write about the California economy: "As a group, immigrants underuse public assistance programs, including MediCal. The undocumented, in particular, live largely in the shadows, working hard, fueling the economy, paying taxes from which they cannot benefit, and fearing government interventions" (p. 2).

Table 2

Percentage of Latino Legal Immigrants on Welfare, 2000

Native country	Percentage
Ecuador	2
Honduras	2
Peru	1
Nicaragua	1
Columbia	2
Guatemala	2
Dominican Republic	7
El Salvador	2
Mexico	2

Note. Information from "The Immigrants," by M. J. Mandel and C. Farrell, *Business Week*, July 2000, pp. 114–122.

Julian Simon (1998), an economist at the University of Maryland and author of *The Economic Consequences of Immigration*, chides critics who charge that immigrants use more welfare services than native-born U.S. citizens. An issue related to jobs and wages is the claim that undocumented aliens take advantage of welfare services and benefits (see Table 2). However, only 2% of the total Latino legal resident aliens receive any welfare benefits. Because undocumented aliens do not want to draw attention to themselves, they are reluctant to use welfare services and will only do so in emergencies; thus, the actual use of welfare services by undocumented Latino immigrants is most likely less than 2% (Simon, 1998). Furthermore, some economists argue that immigrants actually benefit the U.S. economy by lightening the Social Security load imposed by a graying U.S. population because as more native workers retire and collect social security, immigrants, who typically enter the country in the prime of their work lives and tax-paying years, make up the difference. According to Simon, when immigrants do use services, they do so in small numbers. In fact, about 5% of legal and undocumented persons use free medical care, 4% collect unemployment, and 1% use food stamps.

The rapid increase in immigrants, namely Mexican immigrants, has produced a social and cultural backlash. There are some, such as Allan Bloom (1987) and E. D. Hirsch (1987), who advocate the dominance of Anglo culture and urge assimilation to the European-American canon, to the exclusion of the contributions and experience of racial and ethnic minorities. Others, such as Peter Brimelow (1995), urge restrictions on immigration for cultural reasons. Brimelow warns about fragmentation caused by the uneven distribution of various immigrant populations because ethnic cultures concentrated in various large metropolitan areas will have little in common with one another.

Children as Migrant Workers

While the problems of migrant workers in agriculture are extreme and deplorable, the impact on their children guarantees that the problems will persist indefinitely. These children, over 650,000 of them, span ethnic, religious, cultural, and racial groups. They include Chicano children in Texas, California, and the Midwest; African American and Afro-Caribbean children in Florida and elsewhere in the Southeast; Puerto Rican children in the Northeast; and White children throughout the nation (Hansen, 1998; Passel, 1999; U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 2000).

Vicky Goldsberg (1996), in her article "No Choice But Work," discusses the impact of Lewis Hine's somber photographs of the shocking working conditions of America's children in the early 20th century. She comments, "Child labor was not exactly the optimal preparation for a good life in society" (p. 58). She further notes vivid images of the working conditions for migrant children in the 1990s:

I arrive at five o'clock in the morning. While you are having your first dream, sweat washes my face, and I have bathed with fog in the long furrows. While you drop milk in the school's kitchen, I wish I could drink a drop of water because it seems like I never reach the end of the row. . . . While you checked exams . . . I revisited the fields, and sometimes I pulled out snakes instead of vegetables. (p. 54)

Despite the apparent diversity among migrant children, there are many common links that join them: poverty, inadequate health care, substandard housing, and astonishingly poor educational achievement. Jose Cardenas (1997) observed that the migrant child begins a migrant life very early. Migrant children learn early that they have no possessions of their own, no special place to sleep, and no special place to be.

The migrant child also learns early about the reality of mobility (Rothenberg, 1998). Mobility is not just another variable in the life of the migrant child, it is the child's life. It defines the child's world and his/her relationship with the world. Children may live for short periods of time during each year in several communities, sometimes in two, four, six, or even eight different states. Even though their families may have well-established migratory routes, there is no assurance that while on the trek, they will reside in the same communities year after year. To some migrant children, "home" is the location where they live the longest time during the winter or places they visit between migrations (Valle, 1994; Rothenberg, 1998; Coles, 1971).

Furthermore, for migrant workers and their children, there is no definitely scheduled time in any location. Their length of stay is determined by the weather, the labor supply, the crops to be harvested, and the availability of housing. During some seasons, the children may live in a community for a few days, weeks, or months. If a family can secure work with a fishing or agricultural firm, they may reside in one area for a year before returning to their home base (Coles, 1971; Valle, 1994). Cardenas (1997) powerfully sums up the life of a migrant child:

He or she learns that each day brings toil for his parents, back breaking toil; bending stooping and reaching and carrying. He learns that each day means a trip to the field and back from the fields, to a new county or on to another state or to another region of the country. He learns that each day means not aimlessness and not purposelessness motion, but compelled, directed (some would say even forced) travel. He learns, quite literally, that the wages of work is more work. He learns that wherever he goes he is both wanted and unwanted, and that in any case, soon they will be in another place and another. (p. 43)

After a few years, it is possible for the children of migrant workers to have experienced different patterns of mobility. In addition to disadvantages associated with mobility, the migrant child also suffers from the living conditions associated with poverty. These conditions include poor nutrition, inadequate housing, crowded surroundings, and an environment in which

the child has to “make do” because the adults are working in the fields from early morning to late evening. Children are cared for by other children in unsafe conditions, leaving the children vulnerable to life-threatening situations (Prewitt-Diaz et al., 1990; Strange & Gutmann, 1993; Government Accounting Office, 2000).

In addition to dangerous living conditions, limited educational opportunities and poor educational achievement further penalize migrant children. Many migrant adults are poorly educated by American standards, and many do not speak English. They become ready victims of a farm labor system that exploits them mercilessly for as long as they are useful and then forgets them (Prewitt-Diaz et al., 1990; Strange & Gutmann, 1993; Valle, 1994).

It is not surprising that most migrant parents have ambitions for their children’s future that include leaving the migrant stream (settling out) and obtaining a good education. But the very facts of migrancy and poverty make it difficult for migrant children to have meaningful educational opportunities (Strange & Gutmann, 1993). Poor nutrition, poor health, and poor health care reduce a child’s energy, attention span, and motivation. Language problems frequently interfere with migrant children’s progress in school. Furthermore, many migrant children experience embarrassment because of their poor clothes, which makes them feel awkward and conspicuously “different.” Sometimes, community prejudices against migrants are instilled in the local children, which leads to harassment of migrant youths. Often, migrant children must miss school to work or to care for siblings. In many cases, migrant children change schools and communities once, twice, or more times every year (Strange & Gutmann, 1993; Valle, 1994; Anstrom, 1997; Goldsberg, 1996; Christian, 2001).

In a mobile environment permeated by poverty, education is a luxury many parents feel they can ill afford for their children. School attendance for most migrant children is dictated by the needs of the family, and those needs may change from day to day depending on general economic conditions (Salerno, 1991; Strange & Gutmann, 1993; Valle, 1994). If the family has money for rent and food, children are often allowed to attend school. However, because the work availability is not steady, children learn early that they must help their parents. John Kleinert, director of the Center for Immigration Policy at the University of Miami, concluded after reviewing information gained from the Florida Migrant Child Survey:

Quite frequently the children go into the fields with their parents to assist them so as to increase family productivity. By keeping parents supplied with picking sacks and baskets, children give parents more time to work . . . as the children become older, they assume the role of the full-fledged worker. (Olsen & Jaramillo, 1999, p. 23)

Often, by the time the migrant child is 12, he or she may be working from 16 to 18 hours a week. Not long afterward, most drop out of school altogether.

During a 2-year study titled *Children of Crisis*, Robert Coles (1971) worked with migrant families belonging to the East Coast Stream and monitored the

school attendance of 10 migrant families. He found that each child attended school an average of 8 days a month. Children often had colds, stomachaches, asthma, and skin infections. Often, the children lacked clothes and had to wait their "turn" to put on shoes, socks, pants, or dresses that were in fact shared by three or four children. Furthermore, many migrant workers had little confidence in the education that their children could receive in view of their migratory lifestyle. Coles found that the "average" migrant child may be in three different schools in a year.

Furthermore, in addition to limited academic achievement, there is a general lack of acceptance of migrant children by nonmigrant children. According to the Interstate Migrant Education Council (1999), the fact that migrant children are less able to participate in school activities further reduces the reasons to attend school. In addition, there is a lack of educational support of migrant students by their families. Uneducated parents frequently believe that the children are better off in the fields than "wasting" their time in school (Salerno, 1991; Strange & Gutmann, 1993; Schlosser, 1995; Olsen & Jaramillo, 1999).

The result is that migrant workers typically complete 7.7 years of schooling, compared with 12.5 years for the general population. While the nonmigrant student has a 96% chance of entering Grade 9 and an 80% chance of entering Grade 12, the migrant student has a 40% chance of entering Grade 9 and only an 11% chance of entering Grade 12 (Olsen & Jaramillo, 1999).

What migrant children have encountered in their succession of new schools has been devastating enough to lock the vast majority of them into failure. According to Harry Stack Sullivan (1980), a child's self-concept develops from "reflected appraisals of significant others" (p. 3). For poor and minority children in the school system, the reflections they see are likely to be derogatory, unaccepting, patronizing, and generally expressive of powerful negative appraisals (Prewitt-Diaz et al., 1990; Adger & Peyton, 1999). Research suggests that teachers are less favorably inclined toward deprived children even when their school achievements are good, and that negative self-image is seldom related to school achievement and often related to minority status (Adger & Peyton, 1999).

In fact, Cardenas (1997) notes that "Mexican-American and other migrant children of color are culturally different children who are deprived because they are poor. But culturally biased institutions, through constant attack, can succeed in damaging the fabric of culture, thus transforming cultural difference into cultural deprivation" (p. 22). Coles (1971) further suggests that migrancy and poverty, in addition to the physical squalor they often generate, are destructive to the personality. Deterioration begins at an early age. Furthermore, Coles states:

At three or four the children are boisterous, eager, and impatient to experience the next ride, the next camp. Between five and ten those same children experience an ebb of life, even a loss of life. They move along all right; they pick themselves up again and again, as indeed

they were brought up to do as their parents continue to do. They get where they are going, and to a casual eye they seem active enough, strenuous workers in the field. But a change is taking place. Once wide awake, even enterprising, they slowly become dilatory, leaden, slow, laggard, and lumpish. (p. 23)

Around the age of 9 or 10, the depression some migrant children experience takes the form of a kind of self-destructiveness that knows no bounds (Huang, 1993). The consequences of depression in migrant children and youth exacerbate issues of poverty and illiteracy. Often, delinquency, truancy, gang involvement, alcohol, and drug abuse further compound their physical and emotional poverty. Therefore, providing a good education for undocumented children is important (Crandall et al., 1998).

Educational Opportunity and Undocumented Migrant Children

Today, most of the children described as undocumented aliens speak Spanish as their native language, but the number of Asian and African immigrants is also increasing rapidly (White, 1997). Little or no knowledge of English affects other factors related to their schooling experiences. Hence, any discussion of learning must begin with an examination of the significance of bilingual education in the learning opportunities provided to undocumented children (Spray, 1994).

Thomas and Collier (2000) tracked language minority students' academic progress over time by examining the academic achievement measures used by the school systems. They found that non-English speakers, with no schooling in their first language, usually take 7 to 10 years to reach age- and grade-level performance if instruction is given only in English. Students with 2 to 3 years of first-language schooling in their home country usually take 5 to 7 years, and students schooled in high-quality bilingual education programs in the United States usually take 4 to 7 years to reach native-speaker performance levels. Moreover, these findings hold constant, regardless of other background variables such as socioeconomic status and home language. Unfortunately, according to Spray (1994), well-prepared bilingual teachers, resources, and materials are in short supply. In fact, the National Association of Bilingual Education estimates that the United States needs more than 250,000 additional certified bilingual teachers than are currently available (Short & Boyson, 2000). Of the available pool, some are only conversationally proficient in a second language, while others have been rushed through language courses. Many teachers in Mexico are not well prepared to teach English, either; teachers educated in Mexico usually only take a 4-hour English course in their last semester. Clearly, there is tremendous work to be done to develop an adequate supply of bilingual teachers even in optimum circumstances.

Regrettably, the current social climate in some U.S. states is hostile to bilingual education (Adger & Peyton, 1999). Mandates by state and local boards of education to teach only English in public schools have signaled a resurgence of xenophobic attitudes and policies directed at migrant families and their children. In addition, national standards for accountability in the form of testing in elementary and secondary schools have further isolated migrant and undocumented children who are ill equipped to complete these proficiency tests. Thus, the prospects for appropriately addressing the needs of migrant students have diminished.

In spite of these obstacles, some schools are adequately educating migrant children. Some schools have recognized the increase of undocumented families and their children and focused on developing positive attitudes among administrators and teachers, more migrant-friendly admission and school procedures, and quality educational practices. While it is good that teachers expect migrant and immigrant children to be motivated and hard working, it is important for teachers to realize that economic survival is a high family priority, which might limit school attendance and participation. School staff must realize that newly arrived immigrant parents, although they may have been educated in their own country, will have difficulty dealing with the U.S. education system. Immigrant parents are likely to view school in ways unfamiliar to many U.S. teachers and administrators. Staff should receive training about cultural and experiential expectations of the populations they serve (Anstrom, 1997).

The majority of migrant children are Latino, but others are White, African American, Pacific Islander, and Alaska Native. According to Public Law 93-380, school authorities must seek out and identify the children of migrant workers who are eligible to receive services (Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 1974). Special school funds are available for school recruiters to go into the fruit fields, feedlots, and poultry or fish processing plants to recruit migrant students and to enroll them in school (Anstrom, 1997). An outstanding recruitment effort is the basis for all other efforts; unless children are identified and enrolled in school, educational opportunities are nonexistent for migrant children (Adger & Peyton, 1999).

School administrators need to lead the ongoing effort to explain to both parents and staff the procedures that particularly affect immigrant, migrant, and undocumented children. School rules should be made available in the language of the parents, and the purposes of applications, forms, and questionnaires should be clearly explained. Special attention should be given to school practices that may penalize students or parents, such as hidden costs or fines, confusing changes in school hours, bus schedules, or unclear visiting procedures (Crandall et al., 1998; Anstrom, 1997).

The characteristics of good schools include many strategies that can enhance the education of undocumented children. For example, parents are involved and welcomed; staff work as a team on the clear behalf of the students. The school values the students, their families, and their experiences and cultures. Good practices include effective assessment of academic needs and

language proficiency; appropriate class and course placement, including consultation with parents and teachers; and instruction geared to students' prior knowledge and experience. English language learners should be included in classes with English-speaking students, but should also receive instruction or support in their first language for cognitively challenging curriculum. Offering social and academic multicultural programs, dropout prevention efforts, college and career counseling, and "second chance" opportunities for education and training is also important (Government Accounting Office, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 2000).

Conclusion: The Challenge

Partly because of their mobility, but mostly because of their poverty, migrant children are being systematically denied their right to equal educational opportunity. In the mainstream American culture, parents would mobilize to combat this systematic deprivation, forcing responsibility and accountability from their governmental systems. Among migrants, however, their very transiency prohibits social, economic, and political mobilization and organization. More importantly, we live in a society that enfranchises its citizens through their place of residence. Most migrants are truly stateless and cannot receive or exercise the political rights that most other Americans take for granted.

The effects of undocumented migrants on education and future opportunities for migrant children appear to be overwhelmingly negative. Teachers and administrators who work hard to understand the strengths, the lives, and the cultures of undocumented immigrant children help to create a school environment that benefits all students. At the state and local levels, educators and educational institutions must be assertive in addressing the needs of undocumented migrant students. They must ensure that children have access to the social and educational services to which their legal rights entitle them (Mace-Matluck, 1998).

The Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence explores some interesting options for addressing matters of access and educational opportunity for migrant students and their families. As communities and school districts face increasing numbers of elementary and secondary school-age immigrant students possessing low-level English skills and often limited formal schooling, new directions in effectively educating these students will be vital to building public education in the United States. The center suggests the development of "newcomer programs," which place recent immigrant students with limited English proficiency and limited educational experience into special academic environments separate from native English-speaking students. The programs would feed into the local or home school. The intent is to build the educational and social achievements of the migrant student. More importantly, by protecting access to public schools, the programs would entitle undocumented children to various benefits, including bilingual education,

Chapter I, Head Start, and free and reduced lunch (Hunter & Howley, 1990; Hiller & Leone, 1995). These social programs are equally vital to the educational success these children are capable of achieving.

In short, if we are to live true to our motto of “education for democracy,” we must provide appropriate education for all children, and not discount the “tired and huddled masses” of migrant children seeking social and educational opportunity.

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